Maryland PTA is the state’s oldest and largest child advocacy organization that serves as a powerful voice for all children, a relevant resource for families, schools and communities and a strong advocate for public education. We represent thousands of volunteer members in 900 public schools and we are comprised of families, students, teachers, administrators, and business as well as community leaders devoted to the educational success of children and family engagement in Maryland. For nearly 104 years, our mission has been to make every child’s potential a reality by engaging and empowering families and communities to advocate for all children.

Maryland PTA submits this testimony in support of House Bill 53, County Boards of Education – Length of School Year - Adjustments. This bill gives county boards of education the authority to extend the end of the school year by five days without approval from the Maryland State Board of Education. Maryland PTA supports the autonomy of jurisdictions and thus, allowing the local calendars to be set by parents and community members is of utmost importance.

A little over a year ago on Jan. 30, 2018, the State Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Karen Salmon, recommended to the Maryland State Board of Education to grant opening of certain school days in Dorchester, St. Mary’s and Wicomico Counties. This was an effort to help these counties meet the 180-day instructional requirement since there were inclement weather days taken and there currently exists a mandated school end date of June 15 as imposed by the Governor’s Executive Order on August 31, 2016. House bill 131 seeks to return to jurisdictions an opportunity to keep their traditional days off instead of shortening their spring break or compromising any other days scheduled for education purposes such as teacher professional days.

Last March, Maryland PTA submitted a letter to the State Superintendent and the President of the Maryland State Board of Education requesting that waiver approvals consider the costs on the local school systems should teachers not be present during spring break when they may already have scheduled leave. To require that schools be open as a result of a shorter spring break may cost school systems money from the hiring of a substantial number of substitutes. Maryland PTA acknowledges that families of students as well as teachers make arrangements for travel, go on college tours, and some even go to specialized camps. Furthermore, we asked that should schools be open without teachers and students being able to make reasonable alternative arrangements that there be no penalties allotted to them. Hence, students should be provided an excused absence and teachers not have any scheduled professional evaluations or tests that they have to administer or be imposed upon by penalties associated with paid travel, medical operations or otherwise required leave based on the original school calendar.

We submit this testimony in continued partnership with educational stakeholders and respect for jurisdictional autonomy. If local boards of education can be authorized to extend the school end date by 5 days, then it would help alleviate the need to have waiver requests, consider special accommodations for students as well as teachers and potentially minimize the economic impact on local jurisdictions to open schools during a time when many teachers and students may be absent. We urge your vote to SUPPORT House Bill 53.

Testimony is presented on the behalf of

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