Written Testimony Submitted for the Record to the
Maryland House of Delegates
Ways and Means Committee
Education – Required Number of School Days or Hours (HB 19)

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SUPPORT

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 105 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 19 (“HB 19”) addressing the required number of school days or hours. In short, HB 19 would amend the law requiring public schools to be open for at least 180 days and 1,080 hours (1,170 hours for high schools) during the school year to permit public schools to be open for at least 180 days OR 1,080 hours (1,170 hours for high schools). Enacting this change in the law would make it easier for school systems to comply with the law in light of the option for a later, school-year start date and the volatility of the winter weather.

Under the current law, students must attend school for 180 days and the required number of hours per school year. School systems that have a 6-hour school day must include additional days on the school calendar in case of the need for make-up days. Depending on the number of make-up days needed during a year, those school systems might be forced to apply for an exception to policy from the State Department of Education.

A number of other states have similar laws. For example, Iowa Code section 256.7(19) establishes the minimum amount of instructional time as 180 days of instruction or 1080 hours of instruction. The Iowa Education Department points out that the option of choosing a school calendar based on days or hours provides school districts with more flexibility in making difficult decisions about school closings. If Iowa schools have the minimum amount of days or hours, they are not required to make up the time from school closings, even though making up the time is considered sound educational practice.

Maryland PTA is aware that some educators are concerned that amending Maryland Education Code section 7-103 will result in longer work days. HB 19 does not require local school systems to extend the school day beyond the minimum six hours. It simply offers an alternative measurement for the total instructional time required per school year, and more flexibility due to school closings that require the
need for make-up days. HB 19 does not appear to interfere with educators’ ability to negotiate the number of work hours in a school day.

Notwithstanding educator concerns, HB 19 is a good idea for local school systems, children, and families. Maryland has a diverse climate. The western part of the State generally experiences more snow during the winter months, and eastern Maryland is more susceptible to hurricanes and tornadoes in the summer and fall. The alternate methods for calculating required instructional time will allow local school systems to better account for the possibility of missed school days due to inclement weather.

By allowing an hours-based school calendar, all the time children spend in school would count toward the required number for the year. In the case of a school calendar based on the number of days, if children are not in school for at least three hours, the day does not count. While more instructional time might be beneficial for children’s learning, extending the school year to make up days is not necessarily motivational for them. Also, an hours-based calendar might help families plan early, summer vacations without the concern or fear of canceling because of make-up days.

Respectfully Submitted,

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