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 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 383 ("HB 383"), which would require the State Department of Education ("MSDE") to report disaggregated data relating to students with disabilities.

Data on Maryland students with disabilities reported by the U.S. Department of Education include aggregate totals, and statistics related to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act ("IDEA") and Common Core. It is difficult to determine which students in Maryland receive accommodations under § 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. Recently, the Baltimore Sun reported almost 65,000 Maryland students are incorrectly identified as special education students. Improved reporting of data on students with disabilities would help address the media’s pronouncement.

Identifying students with disabilities is important for several reasons. First, local school systems must know which students will require physical accommodations, academic assistance and support, or specialized instruction and considerations. Second, local school systems receive additional funding to educate and support students with disabilities. Additionally, the data provides an overall picture of the students in our public schools. The data is important to evaluating public school performance.

Failing to categorize students correctly, especially students with disabilities, adversely affects the education process. Schools might not receive the appropriate and necessary resources, including teachers and support staff. Moreover, the public and organizations including Maryland PTA get a skewed picture of Maryland’s public schools.
We rely heavily on data to evaluate Maryland’s public schools and student performance. When the data is inaccurate, imprecise, or underreported, our children suffer. It is imperative that we improve data reporting to ensure our public schools have the capability to effectively serve all children, especially those with disabilities.

For the reasons stated above, Maryland PTA supports HB 383 and recommends a favorable report.

Respectfully Submitted,

Edna Harvin Battle

Dr. Edna Harvin Battle
President