

**Written Testimony Submitted for the Record
Maryland House Ways and Means Committee
For the Hearing on HB 1110: Public Schools - Health and Safety
Guidelines and Procedures - Digital Devices
SUPPORT**

The PTA Council of Baltimore County (PTACBC) submits this testimony in support of HB 1110- Public Schools - Health and Safety Guidelines and Procedures - Digital Devices, which requires the State Department of Education, in consultation with the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, to develop health and safety guidelines and procedures for the use of digital devices in public school classrooms.

The PTACBC represents over 30,000 members in more than 150 local PTA/PTSAs serving public schools. PTA's mission is to advocate on behalf of children and youth in the public schools, community and before governmental bodies and other organizations that make decisions impacting children. The PTACBC's membership is comprised of families, students, teachers, administrators, elected officials, and business and community leaders, devoted to the educational success of all children in Baltimore County.

While PTACBC acknowledges that technology can be a powerful learning tool for students, devices must be integrated into classroom learning thoughtfully and appropriately, especially for very young students. There is ample scientific research on the risks of too much screen time for children. For example, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no more than two hours of screen time per day due to associated risks that include negative health effects on weight and sleep; exposure to inaccurate, inappropriate, or unsafe content and contacts; and compromised privacy and confidentiality.¹ A study published this month (February 2017) in the Journal of Pediatrics and Child Health also warns of the negative effects of screen time on the psychological development of children, putting them at a much greater risk for developing mental health issues.²

Currently, there are no safety policies at the state or local level related to the use of digital devices in school classrooms. As a result, the amount of time students use digital devices are not being monitored, putting them at risk for a variety of health issues, such as myopia, headaches, sleeplessness, mental health issues, etc. Children's eyes are especially vulnerable, in part, because they lack the adult pigmentation that might otherwise offer some protection from the blue light emissions of the computer monitors.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration established guidelines for using computer monitors safely at work decades ago. Office workers are informed of the risks to their health, given safety precautions for all manner of ergonomics and lighting, along with recommended screen time limits. Our students deserve the same protections afforded to adults.

For the reasons stated above, **we ask that you SUPPORT passage of HB 1110.**

References:

- 1) Pediatrics Journal, November 2016, VOLUME 138, ISSUE 5, American Academy of Pediatrics Policy Statement- Media Use in School-Aged Children and Adolescents
- 2) Journal of Paediatrics and Child Health, 2017 Feb 6, Clinical and psychological effects of excessive screen time on children (S. Domingues-Montanari)

Jayne Lee
President

Aimee Freeman
Advocacy and Legislation Chair