

Date: January 25th 2022

Document: Public Comment for HB 511

Bill Chief Patron: Delegate Marie March

Commentator: Wanda B. Lott, Loudoun County Virginia

Position: For the bill

Summary of my position:

I have supported the attempts throughout the years to pass a bill in Virginia that would allow homeschool students to participate in interscholastic programs in their local school districts and I fully support HB 511 this year.

I believe a bill such as this is one of the most important bills that the Virginia General Assembly can pass in regards to education and here is why:

1. **It will help in correcting the inequalities parents are facing in being able to exercise their fundamental right to make decisions regarding the upbringing and education of their children, as stated in the Virginia code [1-240.1](#).** - School closures due to Covid-19 exposed many deficits in public education. Once such a deficit is the lack of opportunities for public school parents to be equally involved in decisions regarding their children's education, though data states that parental involvement is a crucial factor in a student's academic achievement. The US Department of Education just announced in December of 2021 their efforts to increase [parental involvement](#). However, currently in Virginia the opposite has been occurring. Parents in the counties in which my children have attended public schools, have repeatedly voiced they have been excluded from being able to make decisions regarding the upbringing of their children. I personally experienced this first hand when school administrators at the school one of my sons attended held a meeting to discuss my son's 504 plan and chose not to invite me to the meeting. This along with many other occurrences was one of the reasons I had to finally make the decision to withdraw him from his local public school district in the fall of 2021 and homeschool him.
2. **It will aid in continual educational equality for Black Virginians** - Over the past decade homeschooling by black parents has increased. This number has increased higher during the Covid pandemic over the past 2 years. In Virginia alone, homeschooling has increased in [120 of Virginia's 132 school divisions](#). Nationwide black families had the largest increase. In April of 2020 3% of black families were homeschooling and by [October of 2020 that number had moved to 16%](#). Due to wealth gaps, historically, black students have viewed and used interscholastic sports as a pathway to [further their academic education](#). Many have used this pathway successfully as my older son's friend, who in 2020, secured a fully paid scholarship to college due to his athletics abilities. However for many students, especially males, many are drawn to play sports because it [benefits their mental health](#). This was the case for my own son who revealed to me that playing football provided him with an outlet from stress. When he began to experience issues in school, I knew that homeschooling was the best

solution for him academically. However, being able to play football at a level that supported his abilities was better for him emotionally. I ended up supporting him continuing in public school and his emotional health over that time has been able to properly mature. However, I am certain that if legislation such as **HB 511** had been in place then, his academics would have not suffered. Though he did graduate from Fairfax County Public Schools on time in 2020, he struggled throughout his freshman year in college and simply is not prepared academically.

I want to be clear that I am a supporter of public schools. I am also a supporter of homeschool. I am a supporter of parents having the right to choose whatever path they feel will achieve academic success and emotional maturity for their children. The data supports the fact that academic success is tied to parental involvement, however all of the **resources** (such as allowing participation in interscholastic programs) are only being given to school districts.

I hope the Virginia General Assembly will understand how important the passing of this bill will be in securing parental educational equality. It will provide parents of students who are athletically bent, the option to withdraw their child and homeschool them if there are issues that their local public school cannot address, while allowing the students' interscholastic participation to remain intact.