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The Honorable Sheila E. Hixson  
Chair, House Ways and Means Committee  
131 House Office Building  
6 Bladen Street  
Annapolis, MD 21401

**Re: House Bill 39 – Orange Ribbon for Healthy School Hours – Establishment**

Dear Madam Chair Hixson,

House Bill 39 establishes the Orange Ribbon for Healthy School Hours certification within the Maryland State Department of Education beginning in the 2016-2017 school year; and provides that the purpose of the Orange Ribbon for Healthy School Hours certification is to recognize local school systems that create, implement, and enforce school start times that are consistent with the school start times recommended by the Maryland State Department of Education, the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, and the American Academy of Pediatrics.

Although PSSAM appreciates the intent of House Bill 39, we believe that there is no need for this certification. PSSAM firmly believes that the starting time for high and middle schools is an issue that is best determined by local Boards of Education. If a local system determines that they want to alter school start times, they have the authority to implement any changes they deem to be necessary. This bill would only recognize school systems for having established certain school start times, but it does not provide any financial incentive for a school system to do so.

There is a sizeable cost factor if high schools started later. The current efficiencies in transportation in most school systems rely on shared buses referred to as double bussing. In the fleet, bus loops are generally used to pick up both secondary and elementary students separately. By staggering start times of schools and closely coordinating these times, school systems are able to generate efficiencies that can save substantial school resources. For example if start times were changed in Harford County, the cost is estimated to be \$7.8M for additional buses and staff. Carroll County similarly would need to add a separate bus run or 40 additional bus routes at a cost of about \$1.2M.

In addition, secondary sports and other activities (practices and events) are set up on the framework of mid-afternoon dismissal/practice/part-time jobs/homework. In some systems, athletics would require additional and separate buses for in-county games as buses would be already in use for elementary routes.

Finally, the research on increased gains in student achievement when start times are changed is mixed. When researchers have studied achievement outcomes, slight improvements have been noted. However, research in one Maryland school system has yielded no increases and when Anne Arundel County examined scores of students on internal achievement tests, they found that students in classes that began before 8 a.m. outperformed students in similar classes that met later in the day.

For the reasons noted above, PSSAM **opposes** House Bill 39 and requests an unfavorable committee report.

Sincerely,

  
Renee McGuirk-Spence