

September 3, 2019

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Senator Jason Lewis and Representative Alice Peisch  
Sent via email: [Angelina.Hong@mahouse.gov](mailto:Angelina.Hong@mahouse.gov)

**RE: AASM support for H. 468**

Dear Chairman Lewis and Chairwoman Peisch:

On behalf of the board of directors of the American Academy of Sleep Medicine (AASM), I am writing to express our strong support for H. 468, which would create a special commission to study school starting times and schedules in Massachusetts. As the leader in the field of sleep medicine, the AASM represents a combined membership of 10,000 accredited member sleep centers and individual members, including physicians, scientists and other health care professionals.

In puberty a natural shift occurs in the timing of the body's internal "circadian" clock, causing most teens to experience a biological drive for a late-night bedtime. Therefore, early middle school and high school start times make it difficult for students to get the 8 to 10 hours of nightly sleep that the AASM recommends for optimal teen health. Simply going to bed earlier is not a realistic option for most teens. As a result, nearly 73 percent of high school students report getting fewer than 8 hours of sleep on an average school night, increasing their risk of depressive symptoms, suicidal ideation and motor vehicle accidents.

It is the position of the AASM that middle school and high school start times should be 8:30 a.m. or later to promote teen health, well-being, safety and learning. While it is true that an operational change in school start times does not automatically assure that every teen will get more sleep on school nights, research suggests that later school start times are associated with longer weekday sleep durations, reduced vehicular accident rates, and improved alertness. In contrast, maintaining an early school start time guarantees that most teens will fail to get enough sleep during the school week.

Teen students in Massachusetts deserve the opportunity to start each day awake, alert, and ready to learn. While the local governing boards of some school districts in the state have been able to implement healthier school start times, school boards in other districts continue to maintain the status quo, failing to prioritize the health and safety of their students and putting them at a competitive disadvantage.

Establishing a commission through H. 468 is an important first step toward the implementation of statewide middle school and high school start times, which would promote education and health equity for children in Massachusetts and help level the playing field for all students to succeed.

Sincerely,

Kelly A. Carden, MD, MBA  
President

cc: Steve Van Hout, AASM Executive Director