

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## Sleep medicine advocacy matters for public health and safety

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On May 12, 2023, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis signed a bill into law to change school start times to no earlier than 8 AM for middle schools and 8:30 AM for high schools in the state, starting in 2026.<sup>1</sup> Florida, where currently about 48% of high schools start before 7:30 AM,<sup>2</sup> is the second state in the country, behind California,<sup>3</sup> to pass a law regarding later school start times, a move advocated by the American Academy of Sleep Medicine,<sup>4</sup> the American Medical Association,<sup>5</sup> and the American Academy of Pediatrics.<sup>6</sup> The efforts of advocates, including the American Academy of Sleep Medicine, have made a difference in policies that stand to improve the sleep health of many. When it comes to sleep health and public policy, much work needs to be done, and we are all part of the equation.

In April, members of the American Academy of Sleep Medicine met with lawmakers and staff on Capitol Hill to highlight key sleep public health messages, including speaking to the implications of clock policy. In March 2023, US Senator Marco Rubio again filed legislation that would make daylight saving time permanent across the country.<sup>7</sup> Ironically, from the perspective of US children headed to school in the fall and winter months, permanent daylight saving time would serve to undo the sleep-related benefits of starting school later in the morning by shifting sunrise an hour later according to the clock.<sup>8</sup> There is some cause for alarm from a safety perspective too, since middle schoolers in Florida—and students of all ages in many parts of the country—would commute to and arrive at school before sunrise during the late autumn and winter months. It was precisely this eventuality that soured public opinion on permanent daylight saving time the last time it was tried in the United States, in 1974. That time, the national policy lasted less than a year.

It is remarkable to observe the degree to which a broad coalition of American Academy of Sleep Medicine members and leadership, as well as other medical societies, has stepped up to advocate for sleep as an essential element of health.<sup>9</sup> In the last few years, the sleep field has been beset by challenges: the Covid-19 pandemic, a major device recall, and staff shortages, to name a few. The optimism and pragmatic idealism of sleep advocacy for

public health serves to remind us of the importance of our purpose—healthy sleep, every night, for every person.

### CITATION

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## DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

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