Written Testimony Submitted for the Record to the
Maryland Senate
Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee
For the Hearing on State Department of Education –
Guidelines on Trauma Informed Approach
(SB 223)
Feb. 6, 2019

SUPPORT

Maryland PTA is the state’s oldest and largest child advocacy organization that serves as a powerful voice for all children, a relevant resource for families, schools and communities and a strong advocate for public education. We represent thousands of volunteer members in 900 public schools and we are comprised of families, students, teachers, administrators, and business as well as community leaders devoted to the educational success of children and family engagement in Maryland. For nearly 104 years, our mission has been to make every child’s potential a reality by engaging and empowering families and communities to advocate for all children.

Maryland PTA submits this testimony in SUPPORT of Senate Bill 223, State Department of Education – Guidelines on Trauma-Informed Approach. This bill establishes the Trauma-Informed Schools Initiative in the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to expand the use of the trauma-informed approach used in schools and intensively train schools on becoming trauma-informed schools. By July 1, 2019, MSDE must select one school from each of a rural, suburban, and urban/metropolitan area to voluntarily participate in the program and receive intensive training on the trauma-informed approach. Maryland PTA welcomes the establishment of guidelines that pertain to protocols properly addressing an adverse childhood experience (ACE) of a child.

An adverse childhood experience is when a child is affected by violence, crime, abuse or psychological trauma. School-based professionals such as teachers, principals, counselors, nurses, psychologists, social workers and paraprofessionals need professional development on the topic of resiliency in trauma-exposed children, thereby creating an education and support system that is trauma-informed at all levels. This bill puts the state one step toward establishing school communities that recognize the importance of building relationships in schools and fostering a sense of empowerment by understanding how a child’s experience prohibits or enables learning.

Maryland PTA wants school districts to have the necessary resources to ensure that schools have the required and qualified personnel to respond to mental, physical, behavioral, developmental and academic needs of all students but especially those affected by ACEs. To combat the negative effects of violence and trauma, Maryland PTA advocates for providing significant resources and incentives to local jurisdictions to create connected communities, positive school climates and trauma-informed schools that keep students healthy.

Furthermore, because state law does not specifically address trauma-informed approaches to student discipline, we believe that this bill supports replacing exclusionary discipline whenever possible with evidence-based, multi-tiered behavioral frameworks, such as positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) that improve school climate and safety. Because Maryland PTA promotes policies that create and expand trauma-informed schools we urge your support of Senate Bill 223.

Testimony is presented on the behalf of

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