Written Testimony Submitted for the Record to the
Maryland Senate
Education, Health and Environment Affairs Committee
For the Hearing on
Education – Personnel Matters – Child Sexual Abuse and Misconduct Prevention
(SB 541)
February 13, 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 541, Education – Personnel Matters – Child Sexual Abuse and Misconduct Prevention. This bill sets forth a more thorough process for the hiring of school employees who have direct contact with minors and K-12 students in public and nonpublic schools, by requiring that all job applicants to county boards of education, nonpublic schools or contracting agencies who will have direct contact with minors submit information regarding former employment and the existence of ongoing investigations or findings of child sexual abuse. Additionally, this bill prohibits county boards of education, nonpublic schools or contractors from entering into any contracts or agreements that have the effect of suppressing information relating to an investigation of a report of suspected child sexual abuse or sexual misconduct by a current or former employee.

One of the top priorities of the Maryland PTA is to ensure the safety of children, especially while they are attending school — an assurance that is currently jeopardized by instances of sexual abuse of children. A 2011 study undertaken by the American Association of University Women (AAUW) found that nearly half of all students in grades 7-12 reported experiencing sexual harassment at school. An earlier study by the AAUW determined that nearly one in 10 students reported they had been subjected to educator sexual misconduct. Other studies and recent incidents in Maryland and across the country suggest that child sexual abuse at the hands of educators and school staff is a pressing student safety problem, and that continued rehiring and lack of shared knowledge among school districts regarding the histories of troubled applicants is a large contributor to the problem. Maryland PTA, therefore believes that SB 541, by increasing scrutiny of applicants’ histories for jobs dealing directly with minors in schools, is of paramount importance and is consistent with our mission to protect the safety of all children.

Maryland PTA also believes that the provision of SB 541 that prohibits county boards of education, nonpublic schools or contractors from entering into contracts or agreements coated in secrecy regarding sexual abuse or misconduct histories of current or former employees is a vital component of combating and eliminating educator sexual abuse and misconduct. It also prevents these employees from going from one jurisdiction to another victimizing children and jeopardizing the safety of the school environment. It is necessary to bring Maryland within full compliance of federal law that prohibits school jurisdictions from knowingly concealing a former employee’s history from future employers within other jurisdictions.

For the reasons stated above, Maryland PTA supports Senate Bill 541 and recommends a favorable report.

Testimony is presented on the behalf of

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