Written Testimony Submitted for the Record to the
Maryland Senate
Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee
For the Hearing on
Public Schools - Student Discipline - Restorative Approaches
(SB 766)
March 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 766, Public Schools - Student Discipline - Restorative Approaches. This bill requires each local board of education to develop a multiyear plan for the adoption, implementation, and continued monitoring of the use of restorative approaches for student discipline, defines “restorative approaches”, and specifies what the multiyear plan must include. Senate Bill 766 also requires, with specified exceptions, that principals must demonstrate that restorative approaches, special education, or other supportive service interventions were implemented before suspending or requesting expulsion of a student.

Maryland PTA recognizes, in line with the National PTA’s position on positive school discipline, that punitive disciplinary policies such as suspension and expulsion are harmful to students, often pushing them, according to recent bodies of research¹, to drop out and enter the criminal justice system; and should only be used as a last resort.

Maryland PTA is also knowledgeable of and deeply concerned about the documented disproportionality, in relation to percentage of crimes or disruptions committed, of suspensions and expulsions among black students and students with disabilities. Black students in Maryland represent 35% of the student population but 60% of out of school suspension recipients. Students with disabilities represent 13% of students but receive 25% of out of school suspensions². These disparities exist and persist despite the fact that research has demonstrated that black students, for instance, commit crimes and infractions at rates no greater than students of other races³.

Restorative practices are approaches that combine a relationship-focused mindset and tools that are conducive to a positive school learning environment for students. These practices foster connection and encourage students to take responsibility for their actions and helps them identify how those actions affect others. Additionally, Maryland PTA is aware of recent research finding that when restorative practices are implemented in schools both in the U.S. and internationally, the results include decreased suspensions and expulsions, decreased bullying, and increased academic achievement among students⁴.
Senate Bill 766 requires the goal of school discipline be defined as restorative and rehabilitative v. punitive and that schools develop plans to implement restorative practices for use in many incidents for minor or low-level student misbehavior. Hence, Maryland PTA believes that this bill is an essential step towards eliminating inequities in punitive discipline. Thus, achieving a safe, equitable, and welcoming learning environment for all students that’s in alignment with the Association’s mission to have children reach their full potential.

It is for these reasons above that Maryland PTA **urges a favorable vote on Senate Bill 766.**

Testimony is presented on the behalf of

**Latisha Corey**

Latisha Corey, President
Maryland Parent Teacher Association
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