



Testimony in Support of House Bill 725

Public Schools - Student Discipline - Restorative Approaches

TO: Chair Kaiser, and Members of the House Ways & Means Committee
FROM: Demaune A. Millard, President & CEO, Family League of Baltimore
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Family League of Baltimore (Family League) supports House Bill 725, Public Schools - Student Discipline - Restorative Approaches. This bill would require a school principal to implement restorative approaches, rehabilitative, special education, or other supportive service interventions before suspending or expelling a student. Each county Board of Education would also be required to develop a multiyear plan for the adoption, implementation, and continued monitoring of restorative approaches to student discipline. HB 725 draws directly from the recommendations of the Maryland Commission on the School-to-Prison Pipeline and Restorative Practices (December, 2018) and would establish a framework for local education agencies (LEAs) across the state to implement a thoughtful and robust approach to restorative practices in schools.

Baltimore City Public Schools, in its newly released “Blueprint for Success,” defines restorative practices as those which build, “positive communities based on the premise that open, respectful communication helps reduce conflict. When conflict does occur, restorative practices encourage students to focus not on punishment, but on the harm caused and on ways to repair relationships.”¹

Restorative practices are critical if our schools are to move toward a more just and equitable approach to school climate and discipline. Current models of school discipline are shown to be inequitably distributed, with Black students, students with disabilities, and lower-income students disproportionately being disciplined, suspended or expelled.² In Maryland, nearly 60% of out-of-school suspensions are of Black students, despite Black students make up only 35% of public school enrollment. Furthermore, while students with disabilities represent 13% of enrollment, they make up 25% of out-of-school suspensions. Factors that lead to this may be the implicit bias of teachers, and studies show that teachers may be monitoring and assessing similar-behaving Black and White students in their classrooms differently.³ A 2018 Maryland Equity Project report found that, “high-suspending schools were less successful academically, had lower graduation rates, lower attendance, higher mobility, and fewer experienced teachers.”⁴ Restorative

¹ Baltimore City Public Schools (2018). *Building a Generation: City Schools’ Blueprint for Success*.

<https://www.baltimorecityschools.org/sites/default/files/2019-01/Blueprint-complete.pdf>

² Barrett, N., McEachin, A., Mills, J. N., & Valant, J. (2017). *What are the Sources of School Discipline Disparities by Student Race and Family Income?* <https://educationresearchalliancenola.org/publications/what-are-the-sources-of-school-discipline-disparities-by-student-race-and-family-i.ncome>

³ Ibid.

⁴ Croninger, R., Sunderman, G. (2018). *High Suspending Schools in Maryland: Where are They Located and Who Attends Them?* <https://education.umd.edu/high-suspending-schools-maryland-where-are-they-located-and-who-attends-them>

practices provide schools with an alternative to a system of school discipline that is reinforcing racial disparities in educational outcomes.

As the designated Local Management Board for the City of Baltimore, Family League's mission is to serve as an architect of change by promoting data-driven, collaborative initiatives and aligning resources to create lasting outcomes for children, families and communities. This work is guided by the State's 8 Child Well-being Results Areas. We support HB 725 in particular due to its alignment with these result areas by working to ensure that "Children are Successful in School," and "Youth Will Complete School."⁵

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⁵ Maryland Governor's Office for Children. "Maryland's Child Well-Being Scorecard." <https://goc.maryland.gov/reportcard/>