
MARYLAND COALITION TO REFORM SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, HEALTH, AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS SENATE BILL 78: PUBLIC SCHOOLS – STUDENT DISCIPLINE REGULATIONS – REMEDIAL MEASURES

JANUARY 22, 2020

POSITION: OPPOSE

The Maryland Coalition to Reform School Discipline (CRSD) brings together advocates, service providers, and concerned citizens interested in transforming school discipline practices within Maryland’s public school systems. We are committed to making discipline responsive to students’ behavioral needs, fair, appropriate to the infraction, and designed to keep youth on track to graduate. **CRSD opposes SB 78**, which would require specific actions by an individual who violates the school’s behavioral expectations.

Senate Bill 78 mandates the use of specific actions—an apology to the individual who was harmed, restitution, a conference between the parent or guardian of the individual who violated behavioral expectations and applicable school faculty and staff, and modification of that individual’s schedule to minimize contact with the individual who was harmed—in response to behavior that violates “clear behavioral expectations”. While we support approaches that are rehabilitative, restorative, and educational for preventing and addressing student behavioral concerns, mandating certain actions for all situations, as this bill does, is against the fundamental principles of restorative approaches that aim to create climates that prevent further harm and conflict. Mandating specific actions does not actually make schools safer for other students or prevent future conflict and could actually escalate conflict.

Restorative approaches recognize that school behavior problems are not easily amenable to simple solutions such as issuing an apology or providing restitution. Rather than a single program or action, restorative approaches are designed to shift school culture to one that emphasizes prevention, early intervention, and creating safe learning environments through multi-faceted and comprehensive approaches to learning, relationship-building, prevention, and accountability. Restorative approaches include a continuum of interventions that build relationships within the school community and repair those relationships when they break down, and can include Positive Behavior Interventions and Support, trauma-informed education, restorative conferences, mediation, and conflict resolution. These approaches prevent or repair harm through dialogue and focus on interventions that foster social emotional skill development, problem solving and prevention.

Quite simply, SB 78 lacks a comprehensive approach that would build supportive school communities, provide students with the tools they need to learn, collaborate, and problem-solve, and hold them accountable in ways that are nurturing, productive, and transformational.

For these reasons, the CRSD opposes Senate Bill 78.

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The Arc Maryland
The Choice Program at UMBC
Disability Rights Maryland
Family League of Baltimore
NARAL- Pro-Choice Maryland
Office of the Public Defender
Project HEAL at Kennedy Krieger Institute

Public Justice Center
Teachers' Democracy Project
Restorative Response Baltimore
The Choice Program at UMBC
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