



Testimony in Support of SB367
State Department of Education – Guidelines on Trauma-Informed Approach
Tuesday, March 3, 2020

TO: The Honorable Paul Pinsky, Chair; The Honorable Cheryl Kagan, Vice Chair; and Members of the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

FROM: Laura E. Irwin, Chair, Montgomery County Community Action Board

As advocates for the low-income community and as the governing body for Head Start, the Montgomery County Community Action Board strongly supports SB367, which will establish a Trauma-Informed Schools Initiative within the Maryland Department of Education to develop guidelines and training on trauma-informed care. The bill will also establish a Trauma-Informed Schools Expansion Program, providing in-depth training for different school districts.

Research indicates that trauma can drastically impact a child’s ability to succeed in school and can have long-term impacts on many other areas of life, such as health. According to the National Education Association, “In times of great stress, or trauma, the brain activates its deeply instinctive, “fight, flight, or freeze” responses, while dialing down the areas of the brain where learning, especially around language, takes place.”¹ Trauma impacts brain development and it can become much more challenging for children who experience trauma to learn and to succeed in school.

With the oversight our board provides to Head Start, we are keenly aware of the impacts of trauma on children and the need for more services. Montgomery County Public Schools, the Head Start delegate, reports that there have been significant increases in the number of children and families needing mental health services. Over the past five years, 44% of Head Start children have received at least one mental health referral. Of these children, 79% received three or more referrals and over half received consultations with parents. Many of these children and families have experienced trauma, which includes exposure to domestic violence, community violence, child abuse and neglect, and family separation. This bill will increase training for staff who work with children to help identify victims of trauma, allowing for earlier intervention and more appropriate treatment.

By providing better training for staff who work directly with students, this SB367 aims to improve screening for trauma, which can lead to earlier intervention for children, and ultimately, better outcomes. We encourage the Committee to pass this bill and to explore other policies and programs that will address the needs of children who have experienced trauma.

¹ <http://neatoday.org/2016/05/17/trauma-and-children/>