



**Informational Testimony for:  
Senate Bill 917: Public Schools – Restorative Practices Schools – Establishment**

**Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee**

**Position: Informational**

March 6, 2024

**Strong Schools Maryland wishes to provide the following testimony related to Senate Bill 917, Public Schools – Restorative Practices Schools – Establishment.** Restorative approaches to school discipline, and restorative practices broadly, are a logical complement to the work Maryland is doing to build a statewide World Class Education system under the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future. In short, schools thrive when their communities thrive, and school communities thrive when everyone is secure in their sense of belonging to that community.

If Maryland is to succeed in creating that system of World Class Schools, adults in school buildings and at central offices will have to do away with the notion that anyone—student or staff—is disposable. It is incongruent and unfair to expect that educators at the school level will build supportive, restorative cultures in their buildings while being managed by central office and state leaders who may still subscribe to punitive, dominance-centered ways of operating.

In 2018, the state’s Commission on the School-to-Prison Pipeline and Restorative Practices produced [a report](#) that recommended many changes that are reflected in this bill. However, the report’s focus on racial equity and cultural competency is not reflected in the bill language. School discipline is inherently an issue about race and culture in our schools, even as we work to diversify the state’s educator workforce.

We believe the bill would benefit from specifying the reporting criteria or detailing the components of the annual December 1 report on implementation.

Pairing policy with funding will be vital in the sustainable success of restorative practices in public schools across the state. The bill’s fiscal note indicates that by fiscal year 2026, participating local school systems will see significant increases in expenditures related to hiring restorative practices coaches. We wonder whether local grantees of the Consortium on Coordinated Community Supports can mitigate those potential costs through collective funding of the role.

We maintain that the legislature must meet its commitment to fully funding the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future—both by leading with example from the state level *and* by ensuring that conditions are such that local jurisdictions can feasibly meet their own obligations to fully fund their schools.

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