

FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS

Senate Bill 917

Public Schools – Restorative Practices Schools - Establishment

Senate Committee on Education, Energy, and the Environment

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The Maryland State Education Association supports Senate Bill 917 with amendments. This bill would alter the duties of behavioral health services coordinators and the Maryland Consortium on Coordinated Community Supports related to implementing Restorative Practices Schools throughout the State. It would also require the State Department of Education to develop a comprehensive plan to implement requirements for the establishment of Restorative Practices Schools and require the Department to annually report to the General Assembly on the implementation of Restorative Practices Schools.

MSEA represents 75,000 educators and school employees who work in Maryland's public schools, teaching and preparing our almost 900,000 students so they can pursue their dreams. MSEA also represents 39 local affiliates in every county across the state of Maryland, and our parent affiliate is the 3-million-member National Education Association (NEA).

We unequivocally believe that restorative justice practices are essential in creating a positive, safe, equitable, and healthy school environment and culture. A large body of evidence suggests that restorative justice practices build and improve relationships that foster strong school communities and dismantle the school to prison pipeline.

To that end, we appreciate that this bill seeks to establish restorative practices training for school employees. Statewide standards for staff training in a variety of restorative approaches, including de-escalation strategies,

implicit bias, and trauma-informed practices are paramount to ensuring that historically marginalized students learn in a safe, healthy, and supportive environment. We would urge greater specificity regarding the standards and scope for such training, including any attendant changes to professional expectations or school policies. Educators will need clarity around how to approach the instructional time required to implement practices such as restorative circles or peer mediation. Formal or informal expectations around lesson pacing, daily routines, and behavioral policies must therefore be reevaluated and negotiated with these new practices in mind, and any changes must be clearly communicated to ensure that restorative approaches are adopted thoroughly and consistently. It is also important that all training is subject to collective bargaining such that pay, hours, and professional expectations can be clearly defined by LEAs and local unions.

To maximize the positive impact to students, restorative practices should be aligned with other school support frameworks. Staff must coordinate the evaluation, planning, and implementation of restorative practices, community school wraparound supports, and other targeted interventions at both the state and local levels. While the hiring of county board-employed restorative coaches will be an asset to this process, we remain concerned the implementing restorative practices will require more staffing and technical support than is currently reflected in the bill. Requiring dedicated restorative practices staff through MSDE and clarifying the role of restorative coaches would promote alignment with related support frameworks. Further, we believe that students will be best served when the school-based staff primarily responsible for implementing and guiding restorative practices are employees of the county board.

A commitment to restorative practices requires a mindset shift, one that we sincerely believe can transform schools to be more equitable and just. We recognize the urgency of advancing restorative practices across the state and we hope to continue this important conversation.

With amendments reflecting the concerns above, we would urge the committee to issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 917.