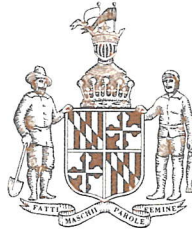


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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Senate Bill 865 – Juvenile Law – Truancy Reduction Pilot Program - Expansion

February 28, 2024

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee:

Truancy in our local schools is a problem that has afflicted our county's public schools for many years, but since the pandemic we have seen a rise in the number of students who have either chronic absenteeism or are truant.

As an example, Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) reports the following data:

- Chronic absenteeism (defined by MCPS as a student who has missed 10% or more of the days they are enrolled for any reason) remains higher districtwide at 21.4% of students in the first marking period this year than the pre-pandemic level of 19.4% in the 2018-2019 school year; but lower year to date than the pandemic high point of 26.2% in the 2022-2023 school year.
- High schools have higher levels of chronic absenteeism. In the last school year 33.2% of high schoolers were chronically absent; this is down to 29.2% in the first marking period, approximately the same as the 2018-2019 level.
- The patterns of chronic absenteeism for subgroups of students mirror these overall trends. Chronic absenteeism rates are highest among Hispanic students, Emerging Multilingual Learners, and students receiving special education services.

Counties have established some programs to address and prevent truancy but given the high rate of chronic absenteeism and truancy in the state, more needs to be done.

Senate Bill 865 will establish the Truancy Reduction and School Reengagement Pilot Program Expansion as a tool for administrative judges to use in juvenile courts across the State in an effort to focus on positive and productive interventions for juveniles in truancy cases.

The truancy courts addressed by this bill are juvenile-based problem-solving courts that focus on children who are required to attend school under Maryland law and who do not regularly attend school despite the efforts of school officials to engage the youth and their parents with school. The goal of this truancy court is to (1) look at root causes of a child's truancy and school disengagement and (2) design and implement services that engage the child and family with the child's education, and thereby increase attendance and success in education.

The Truancy Reduction and School Reengagement Program has been successfully implemented in several Maryland counties. Senate Bill 865 will expand the program statewide and be another tool for our school systems to use to address the problem of truancy.

There are many reasons why our students are missing school and for many of those students the circumstances of their absences are out of their control. Having a multifaceted approach that works with students, families and local services will help these students reengage in school and receive the education they deserve, and so I respectfully request a favorable report on Senate Bill 865.