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Education, Energy, and the  
Environment Committee

Energy Subcommittee

Chair, Joint Electric Universal  
Service Program Workgroup



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**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB917**  
**Public Schools – Restorative Practices Schools – Establishment**

Education, Energy and the Environment Committee  
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Chair Feldman, Vice-chair Kagan, members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you on SB917 Public Schools – Restorative Practices Schools – Establishment. This bill aims to adopt “restorative” practices in all Maryland public schools.

A restorative school program is a school-wide effort to create a positive, relationship-focused learning environment which promotes respect, community, responsibility, accountability, and empowerment among students and staff. It is not a mental health, discipline, attendance, human resources, instructional, or curriculum program. Instead, restorative practices are a proactive approach to conflict resolution which have been shown to improve school climate and narrow disparities between students of all backgrounds.

Currently, Maryland public schools are afflicted with a variety of problems from rising truancy to falling graduation rates to conflicts between students and teachers. Improving student well-being and student-teacher relations has been a priority for the State since the Blueprint for Maryland's Future was enacted in 2021. In this legislation, the Blueprint established the Maryland Consortium on Coordinated Community Supports (MCCCS) to focus on meeting student behavior health needs in a holistic, non-stigmatized, and coordinated manner. The Consortium was tasked with developing best practices for the creation of a positive classroom for all students. Moreover, funds were set aside for student behavioral health services as well as training staff to recognize student behavioral issues. Additionally, schools were also required to appoint mental health services coordinators within each school to provide these services and ensure the competence of trained staff.

SB917 plans to take what was already established and funded within the Blueprint for a Restorative practice program. This is because restorative practices have been proven to improve student outcomes, address teacher retention issues, and uplift school climate in a number of Baltimore schools. A Johns Hopkins analysis of the 15 Baltimore City schools using restorative practices found suspensions were reduced by 44% in the program's first year. After five years of restorative practices, school arrests were reduced by 81% - indicating a reduction

in violent behavior and a major step towards closing the school-to-prison pipeline. A nationwide study by the RAND Corporation corroborated these results, finding that students in restorative schools were suspended less frequently, suspended for shorter durations, less likely to be suspended multiple times, and referred fewer students to alternative schools compared to non-restorative schools. RAND also found that restorative schools narrowed the disparity in suspensions of Black, Latino, low-income, and students with disabilities, who are suspended at more than twice the rate of their peers in non-restorative schools. These findings are indicative of the impact restorative practices have on students' conduct and the learning environment. Restorative schools reduce the likelihood of dysfunctional behavior and in turn, improve students' and teachers' perceptions of school safety and learning.

Restorative practices do not just improve conduct-- they also foster a positive classroom culture and strengthen educators' connections with their students. Baltimore City Public Schools found that restorative practices improved educators' perceptions of teaching, improved the classroom climate, and increased the respect students gave to all members of the classroom community. In Baltimore City, 72% of school staff reported an improvement in school climate and 69% reported an improvement in students' respect for one another after integrating restorative practices.

SB917 will integrate these restorative practices into public schools starting with 50 schools by June 30, 2026. The Division of Student Support, Academic Enrichment, & Education Policy within the MDSE will develop and oversee the comprehensive restorative plan for Maryland public schools. The plan will establish standards a school must meet to be considered restorative, outcomes and performance metrics, and data collection and reporting protocols to measure performance by. The bill mandates a restorative practices coach in every school and restorative practices training for school staff. In operational restorative schools, restorative coaches are often an existing staff-member who has received restorative training.

Restorative practices have already been shown to teach students how to positively engage with their education, peers, and instructors. Its whole-school level approach builds not just a more supportive school community but also kinder, safer, and more empathetic one. These practices are proven to raise attendance rates, build positive relationships, boost teacher sentiments, and improve school climate. SB917 leverages existing resources to weave restorative practices into the school day with minimal disruption, fulfilling the vision that was set out in the Blueprint three years ago.

For these reasons, I am requesting a favorable report on SB917.

With kindest regards,



Benjamin Brooks