

Education Advocacy Coalition for Students with Disabilities

SENATE EDUCATION, ENERGY, AND THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

SENATE BILL 917 – PUBLIC SCHOOLS-RESTORATIVE PRACTICES SCHOOLS-ESTABLISHMENT

DATE: MARCH 6, 2024

POSITION: SUPPORT

The Education Advocacy Coalition for Students with Disabilities (EAC), a coalition of more than 40 organizations and individuals concerned with education policy for students with disabilities in Maryland, provides this testimony in support of Senate Bill 917. Senate Bill 917 is a visionary bill that seeks to fundamentally change school climate by gradually, over a ten-year period, expanding restorative practices to all schools in Maryland.

Much needs to change before this vision can be realized, but Senate Bill 917 offers a roadmap for creating this change. Too many students in general, and too many students with disabilities in particular are subjected to punitive and exclusionary school discipline; rather than continuing this harmful and counter-productive practice, Senate Bill 917 would instead require school systems to place an emphasis on recruiting and training coaches to provide monitoring and improvement of schoolwide restorative practices programs and the integration of these programs into the daily practices and activities of the school.

We appreciate that the bill allows time for educators, districts, and communities to shift to a restorative practices approach. Although evidence-based classroom and school-wide strategies that can be used to support this framework do exist, the mindset of adult educators and staff is also essential to effective implementation. The gradual approach to statewide implementation allows necessary time for the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) and Local Education Agencies (LEAs) to ensure that a restorative approach is adopted by school and district leadership and to build a supportive infrastructure across the state.

Re-imagining school discipline and school climate requires commitment to a lengthy journey. But without a willingness to take the first step on that journey, change cannot happen.

For these reasons, the EAC supports Senate Bill 917.

For more information or if questions, please contact Leslie Seid Margolis, Co-Chairperson, at lesliem@disabilityrightsmd.org or at 443-692-2505.

Respectfully submitted,

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