

MARYLAND COALITION TO REFORM SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

SENATE JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS COMMITTEE SENATE BILL 865: Juveniles - Truancy Reduction Pilot Program - Expansion

DATE: February 28, 2024

POSITION: OPPOSE

The Maryland Coalition to Reform School Discipline (CRSD) brings together advocates, service providers, and community members dedicated to transforming school discipline practices within Maryland's public school systems. CRSD is committed to the fair and equitable treatment of all students, including pregnant or parenting students, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, religion, and socio-economic status, and reducing barriers to learning for all students. **CRSD opposes SB 865**, which would expand a formal judicial truancy court program.

CRSD opposes SB 865 as it would expand a formal truancy court program without evaluating the effectiveness of the pilot programs. The pilot programs were reviewed in both 2008 and 2011, and those studies recommended more data prior to expansion.¹ More data should be collected before expanding court involvement.

Truancy court referrals funnel children into the school-to-prison pipeline. A single court appearance increases the chance that a young person will drop out of school.² For instance, students in truancy court can face sanctions for non-compliance with court orders, including counseling and detention. If students do not comply perfectly with court orders, they can go before the truancy court officer again.

Additionally, funneling students into truancy court ignores that many students who are truant have unmet academic and behavioral needs. A truancy court pilot program would not encourage accountability on the part of the school system which may have failed to meet a student's needs. Prior to referring a child to a truancy court, a school system should be required to show that it has exhausted school and community-based resources. For students with a disability who have an individualized education program (IEP) or Section 504 plan, the school team should address attendance concerns through goals, supports, and accommodations related to attendance.

For these reasons, **CRSD opposes SB 865**.

For more information, please contact the Maryland Coalition to Reform School Discipline at CRSDMaryland@gmail.com

CRSD MEMBERS

Project HEAL (Health, Education, Advocacy, and Law) at Kennedy Krieger Institute

¹ Administrative Office of the Courts, *Assessing School Attendance Problems and Truancy Intervention in Maryland: A Synthesis of Evidence from Baltimore County and the Lower Eastern Shore*, at 99; Md. Dept. of Leg. Services, Office of Policy Analysis, *Approaches to Solving the Problem of Truancy* (2008).

² Am. Civ. Liberties Union, *Bullies in Blue: The Origins and Consequences of School Policing* (2017); Sweeten, *Who Will Graduate? Disruption of High School Education by Arrest and Court Involvement*, 23 Justice Quarterly 4 (2006).

Free State Justice

ACLU of Maryland

Progressive Maryland

Maryland Office of the Public Defender

Disability Rights Maryland

Youth Education and Justice Clinic, University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law

Public Justice Center, Education Stability Project

The Choice Program at UMBC

League of Women Voters of Maryland

Baltimore Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools