

MARYLAND ALLIANCE FOR JUSTICE REFORM

Working to end unnecessary incarceration and build strong, safe communities



To: Chair Vanessa Atterbeary and The House Ways and Means Committee
From: Jennifer Zito and Bill Carlson, MAJR Executive Committee
Date: February 26, 2024

The Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform (MAJR - www.ma4jr.org) support HB1257 to begin the effective (phased) implementation of Restorative Practices in all Maryland schools, resulting in a reduction of the "school-to-prison" pipeline.

A 2023 comprehensive study [reference 1, below] of 45 states showed that 3% of individuals serving time in U.S. prisons were under 18 when they committed the crime that led to their imprisonment. By contrast, Maryland is one of just nine states with more than 1,000 prison inmates serving time for crimes they committed as children, and one of just four states where that group is double the national average with 6% of the prison population. Maryland also has one of the largest racial disparities out of the 45 states whose data the group analyzed: more than 90% of the Maryland inmates incarcerated since childhood are people of color, and more than 80% are Black.

The report [reference 2, below] of the Maryland Commission on the School-to-Prison Pipeline and Restorative Practices - an 18-month study established by HB1287 (2017), urged (pg. 7) **"Maryland schools to transition to what we broadly define as 'restorative approaches to building and sustaining positive learning environments'."** It also found that (pg. 69) **"All districts interviewed reported significant ... challenges in ... implementing restorative approaches ... as funding for adequate training, coaching, and technical support"**. To date, the state has not responded to this need, even in the landmark 2020 legislation "The Blueprint for Maryland's Future", nor its implementation by the Maryland State Department of Education.

HB1257 directly addresses this important unmet need. Offsetting short term costs, it offers long term reduction in Maryland prison populations and taxpayer costs, plus gains for young adults' education and employment.

The Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform (MAJR) is a nonpartisan, all-volunteer organization of nearly 2000 Marylanders who advocate for sensible, evidence-based legislative and policy changes in Maryland's correctional practices. MAJR thanks you for the opportunity to provide input on this important legislation and urges the committee to give HB1257 a favorable report.

(1) Human Rights for Kids. (2023) [Crimes Against Humanity: The Mass Incarceration of Children in the United States](#).

(2) Maryland Commission on the School-to-Prison Pipeline and Restorative Practices. (2018, December). [Final report and collaborative action plan](#).