



February 26, 2024

The Honorable Delegate Vanessa E. Atterbeary, Chair
The Honorable Delegate Jheanelle K. Wilkins, Vice Chair
House Ways & Means Committee

RE: Letter of Information – HB1257 (Public Schools – Restorative Practices – Establishment)

Dear Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, Committee Members, and Bill Sponsors,

The Maryland Alliance for Racial Equity in Education (MAREE), a coalition of education advocacy, civil rights, and community-based organizations committed to eliminating racial disparities in Maryland’s education system, is writing today to submit a letter of information regarding HB1257, as introduced by Delegates Pasteur and Addison. While we agree with the merits of building a more systematic framework and strategic planning for the introduction of restorative practices into more Maryland public schools, we wish to further suggest several key considerations for legislators to keep in mind as the General Assembly analyzes potential next steps.

As an advocacy coalition that centers the needs of students of color in Maryland’s public education system – young people who far too often face tremendous systemic inequities and challenges in their school experience – we recognize the promise and potential in seeking a restorative practices model for our state’s public schools, particularly regarding student social, emotional, and academic development (SEAD) and school discipline and belonging practices. According to recent MSDE data, Black students represented more than 60% (33,984) of all instances of out-of-school suspensions and expulsions in Maryland, despite only comprising 33.2% of the student population in the same school year. In contrast, white students, who represented 33.9% of the population in Maryland’s public schools, only accounted for a little over 20% of out-of-school suspensions and expulsions, representing a striking disparity in student disciplinary outcomes along racial lines.¹

Addressing and removing such disparities is a paramount priority of MAREE. We agree with the intent of HB1257 that restorative practices offer a valuable culture shift and alternative to the harmful status quo of exclusionary discipline that has been commonplace in our state’s schools. Even more, restorative practices at their core are concerned with the important work of improving and strengthening relationships between people and communities. These models have immense potential to introduce a transformative approach to our schools that, if implemented with fidelity and in coordination with other evidence-based strategies, could foster a more productive, collaborative, and affirming educational experience where all

¹ “Number of Suspensions and Expulsions by Major Offense Category - 2021-2022 Out-of-School Suspensions and Expulsions in Maryland Public Schools,” Maryland State Department of Education, https://marylandpublicschools.org/about/Documents/DCAA/SSP/20212022Student/2022_Student_Suspensions_BySchool_OutOfSchool.pdf

students can thrive. However, the successful implementation of such a shift hinges on several critical factors that cannot be overlooked:

- *Adequate Allocation of Fiscal and Human Capital Resources:* Implementing restorative practices at scale, even with the suggested pilot of 50 Maryland schools by June 2026, will require significant investments of people and funding to properly hire, train, and establish the cultural conditions in our districts and schools to be conducive to success. In order for required personnel to receive the high-quality preparation in restorative practices necessary to move the needle for students, Maryland would have to dedicate financial resources and coordinate expert technical assistance to support districts over the implementation period and commit to ongoing evaluation for impact.
- *Diverse, Intentional Community Engagement:* Restorative practices have their roots in communities of color, spaces where neighborhoods and education systems thrived on respect, love, harmony, and positive learning. In order for restorative practices to flourish and realize their fullest impact, districts and schools must thoughtfully engage with stakeholders – parents, caregivers, neighborhood leaders, and other community-based organizations – of all backgrounds in order to increase and sustain a restorative culture. Such engagement is required to gain buy-in and reinforcement both within and beyond a school’s walls.
- *Commitment to Anti-Racism and Anti-Bias:* Restorative practices represent a step in the right direction that turns away from our country and our state’s long history of educational violence, harm, and seclusion. Our status quo – and the disparities along racial and socioeconomic lines far too often witnessed in our current system – has inherently racist elements. Any effort to incorporate and implement restorative practices must include an explicit commitment to anti-racism and anti-bias.

By approaching the expansion of restorative practices in Maryland’s schools with intentionality, allocating adequate fiscal and human resources, providing comprehensive learning opportunities, and fostering genuine community and stakeholder engagement, we can create schools where all students feel valued, respected, and empowered to succeed. While we believe HB1257 in its current form requires a more robust and strategic approach in order to most thoughtfully strengthen restorative practices in our public education system, we remain committed to lending our voices and thought partnership to the important goal of getting it right for Maryland’s students now and in the future.

Sincerely,

The Maryland Alliance for Racial Equity in Education (MAREE)