

Thanks, Madam Chair and members of the committee, for the opportunity to testify in support of HB1257

My name is Steve Plunk and I serve as the full-time Director of Restorative Practices at Hampstead Hill Academy, a public charter school in SW Baltimore that serves approximately 850 students in preschool through grade 8.

You may have heard of Hampstead Hill - we are the top ranked elementary and middle school in Baltimore City. This year, our elementary school ranked in the 89th percentile in the state, while our middle school came in at the 97th percentile. It's a workplace that I love coming to every day, and I think our kids would agree!

Our chronic absenteeism rate is at 11%. This is well below the city average 50%. Our suspension rate is less than 2%, also well below the city average. We would not be where we are today if it weren't for Restorative Practices. It's at the heart of our school culture, and it's been in place since 2007.

As the Director of Restorative Practices, my days are spent coordinating and evaluating our community building restorative circles and mindfulness practices, facilitating conflict circles, conducting check-in meetings and lunch bunches, coordinating our restorative after-school detention program, and being available for the student who needs emotional support or a little time-out. I also oversee a group of 24 trained restorative practices student ambassadors who are instrumental in extending the breadth and depth of the program.

My job is a full time job, and it's one of the reasons I am here today to testify for this bill. The effective implementation of restorative practices in Maryland schools is dependent on a dedicated staff position like mine to lead the charge. I look forward to the day when I can network with other restorative practices coaches across the state to learn and share implementation strategies and celebrate the success stories that are bound to happen with legislative support of this bill.

I thank you again for your time and for the opportunity to speak today.

Steven Plunk
Director of Restorative Practices, Hampstead Hill Academy