



Date: February 28, 2024

To: Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins and the Members of the Ways and Means Committee

Reference: House Bill 1257 - Public Schools - Restorative Practices Schools - Establishment

Position: FAVORABLE

Dear Chair Atterbeary and Committee Members:

On behalf of LifeBridge Health's Center for Hope we thank you for this opportunity to provide information in strong support of establishing a framework for restorative schools in Maryland, House Bill 1257. Center for Hope annually provides intervention and prevention services for over 7,700 survivors and caregivers impacted by child abuse, domestic violence, community violence, and elder justice. Over 4,300 of our population helped last year were children. At LifeBridge Health, we recognize the devastating impact of violence in our communities, and the growing number of victims of all ages. Violence is a public health issue. We help our communities by partnering with the people in them to break the cycle of violence. At Center for Hope, we partner with community leaders, stand shoulder to shoulder with parents and caregivers, and help provide survivors of violence and crime with support and healing, in order to grow a collective hope.

The proposed Restorative Schools Act creates important support for our students, teachers, and communities in ensuring student success while recognizing the complex set of challenges present in our schools today. One such facet Center for Hope would like to share its expertise and support is around the various conflict resolution elements proposed in restorative schools. Conflict resolution helps model healthy relationships and boundaries, which create important skills to help prevent intimate partner abuse, assault, and human trafficking. Teaching conflict resolution skills, as a part of the restorative school approach, will also improve school safety and promote learning.

Conflict resolution also helps reduce all forms of gun violence (homicide, suicide, shootings) by teaching critical skills to all children. Gun deaths are leading killer of children and youth in Maryland and throughout the United States. With the wide availability of guns for children, conflict is often quickly and poorly "resolved" through gun violence. Efforts such as community violence intervention have helped drive down homicides and shootings through mediating conflict. Reducing the impulse to peacefully resolve a conflict – either interpersonal or even among one's own inner struggles will reduce homicide and suicide.

Center for Hope's hospital violence responders and Safe Streets violence interrupters help victims and families work through emotional responses towards collaborative problem-solving – rather than retaliatory violence. Participants often say they wish they'd had these skills earlier in life. Proof in this effort through our own local

conflict resolution efforts can be seen by the dramatic 28% decrease in gunshot wound admissions in the Sinai Emergency Department from FY22 to FY23.

Research shows that conflict management skills have reduced suspensions, office visits, and fights. (See, Restorative Practices in Baltimore City Schools, Open Society Institute (2020); Middle School Conflict Resolution, Communities in Schools of North Carolina (2015). The U.S. Bipartisan Safer Communities Act of 2022 authorized \$17 million in federal funding for Maryland schools in to implement comprehensive evidence-based violence intervention programs such as restorative practices and conflict management.

We urge a favorable report on establishing restorative practices in Maryland's schools and support HB1257.

Respectfully submitted,



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