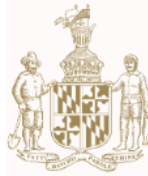


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Committee on Education, Energy,
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Honorable Vanessa Atterbeary, Chair
Honorable Jheanelle Wilkins, Vice Chair
Ways and Means Committee
Maryland House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

March 27th, 2024

SB1039 Truancy Reduction Pilot Program

Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and esteemed members of this committee,

SB1039 will permit Frederick County to establish a Truancy Reduction Pilot Program. A truancy court is a six-to-nine-month program to engage families and rehabilitate youth by addressing their specific needs. The process begins with a petition of truancy filed by the public school when a student is unlawfully absent at least 8 days a quarter, 15 days a semester, or 20 days in a school year. When a youth is found to be truant, the program works with a public school liaison and the family to address the barriers they are facing to attending school. Many counties in Maryland already have a truancy reduction program including: Dorchester, Harford, Kent, Prince George's, Somerset, Talbot, Wicomico, and Worcester counties.

In Frederick County, we have an informal, voluntary Truancy Reduction Council program, established by Judge Raymond Brubaker, that has shown positive results. Forty-seven percent of the youth referred to the program are now achieving lawful attendance rates. Moreover, higher percentages of caregivers cooperating with the process show higher percentages of students attending more days of school. Our program would differ only slightly from our counterparts elsewhere in the state in that our program, being grown out of this informal effort, will take a holistic view of truancy reduction. Currently, Judge Raymond

Brubaker's program helps stabilize families by connecting them with community resources in order to create an environment conducive to truancy reduction. I believe the quasi-formality of the program has helped families take attendance seriously and that a formal process will increase family and student participation and re-engagement.

Since the pandemic, truancy rates across the State have surged. During the 2021-2022 school year, three-quarters of schools in Maryland suffered from high or extreme levels of chronic absence among students¹. Similarly, in the 2022-2023 term over a quarter of Maryland's kindergarten through 12th grade students (29.8%) were chronically absent. Beyond the damage that missing so much school can have on a student's education, this kind of truancy is also a risk factor for drug use, juvenile and adult criminality, suicide attempts, and employment problems.

By implementing this Truancy Reduction Pilot Program and addressing the specific needs of participants, we can steer students towards their brightest futures. I urge a favorable report on SB1039.

Sincerely,



Senator Karen Lewis Young

¹