

Sponsor Testimony
Public Schools - Discipline-Related Data - Collection and Publication (HB 890)
Delegate Aaron Kaufman
February 21, 2024
Ways and Means Committee

Good afternoon Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and distinguished colleagues. For the record my name is Delegate Aaron Kaufman representing District 18.

I am asking for a favorable report on HB 890 – Discipline Related Data. The need for this legislation was brought to my attention by Annie Carver, a legal advocate from Project HEAL at the Kennedy Krieger Institute. HB 890 would require the State Department of Education to make discipline related data easily accessible to the public, report this data to the Governor yearly, and explicitly break down the numbers to expose discrimination in our public school systems across the state.

HB 890 will specifically categorize disciplinary data by grade level, race, ethnicity, geography, disability status, individualized education program, socioeconomic status, and gender. Additionally, the bill seeks to lower the risk ratio from 3.0 to 2.0. The risk ratio is set at 3.0, so a school would have to suspend a student group at three times the rate of other students in order to be flagged as a school that disproportionately disciplines students. The bill language lowers it to 2.0. There are concerns that 3.0 as a risk ratio is discriminatory and a threshold value greater than 2.0 undermines the spirit of disproportionate impact regulations.

Studies have shown that minority students and students with disabilities are twice as likely to be suspended from Maryland public schools than other groups (REL 2018). By lowering the risk ratio to 2.0, HB 890 will protect students who face discrimination under our current legislation.

This legislation is essential as it will hold public schools accountable and prevent continued disciplinary inequality. Because this bill would require the Maryland State Department of Education to report out the number of suspensions each year, this will hopefully prevent and /or reduce the profiling of students who are troubled or may need extra assistance in school.

The bill also has provisions that school districts can espouse to address problem behaviors with the goal of improving student behaviors and fostering a positive school environment.

I strongly urge a favorable report on HB 890. Thank you and I will gladly take any questions you may have.