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of Howard County**

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**Board of Education of Howard County
Testimony Submitted to the Maryland Senate,
Education, Energy and the Environment Committee
March 27, 2025**

HB0879: FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS

Task Force to Improve Attendance and Reduce Chronic Absenteeism in Schools

The Board of Education of Howard County (the Board) supports **Task Force to Improve Attendance and Reduce Chronic Absenteeism in Schools** with amendments to add representation to the Task Force.

HB0879 establishes the Task Force to Improve Attendance and Reduce Chronic Absenteeism in Schools which will be composed of representatives appointed by the State Superintendent. The Task Force would be responsible for making recommendations on: a single definition of chronic absenteeism; the role that the community, public agencies, public school systems and schools, parents, and students have in solving the problem of chronic absenteeism; the best practices for data collection relating to student chronic absenteeism and tracking student attendance; and the most effective practices to prevent and eliminate chronic absenteeism that are culturally responsive and nonpunitive. A report of findings and recommendations would be due December 31, 2025.

Following the work of the Task Force, HB0879 requires the Maryland State Department of Education to update regulations on student attendance to incorporate the most effective practices identified by the Task Force and adopt regulations that include common definitions for chronic absence, chronic absenteeism, and day of attendance. By June 30, 2026, MSDE must distribute the toolkit developed by the Task Force on identifying and preventing chronic absenteeism for school leaders and distribute to each local school system in the state, guidance on identifying and preventing chronic absenteeism.

The targeted, nationwide research conducted related to attendance and chronic absenteeism makes it clear that HCPSS is not alone in identifying both as a primary area of focus to improve student achievement. While comparing HCPSS attendance and chronic absenteeism rates to all other districts in Maryland, HCPSS has the highest attendance rate (93.6%) and lowest rate for chronic absenteeism (18.4%). Despite that distinction, there is still much work to be done in HCPSS to improve attendance and chronic absenteeism. The study under HB0879 could support local school system efforts to continue to bring down these numbers.

Based on the stakeholders HCPSS has found to be valuable for this work, additional membership which may benefit the Task Force includes school nurses, school psychologists, social workers, and representatives of minority groups and multilingual learners. While amendments made by the House add “one school-based licensed clinical social worker, registered nurse, or other school-based public health professional” these professions each offer different perspectives that should be considered rather than one or the other.

With amendments to these additional representatives, we urge a FAVORABLE report on HB0879 from this Committee.