



For more information, please contact
Ebony Battle
ebattle1@umaryland.edu

February 4, 2024

Ebony Battle
Towson, 21286

TESTIMONY ON SB0068- POSITION: FAVORABLE
Education, Energy, and the Environment-Restorative Practices Schools
- Comprehensive Plan

TO: TO: Chair Korman, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

My name is Ebony Battle. I am a resident of Baltimore County. I am submitting this testimony in support of restorative practice. As a graduate student, I facilitate weekly restorative circles with Baltimore City Public School students. Additionally, I also facilitate talking circles with Indigenous LGBTQIA+ teens at a local community center. These experiences in circle with students has shown me how vital it is to uphold and grow restorative practices as they were intended.

Community settings build healing practices. Camaraderie is a vital aspect of talking circles. Healing circles are a traditional Native American practice that engages the community in discussions that allow them to heal and learn from each other. I am troubled by the language that focuses on disciplinary actions rather than community building. Schools already utilize disciplinary actions daily. To extend these practices isn't needed. It can also have vast consequences for marginalized students. It fuels the school-to-prison pipeline and colonizes indigenous traditions. Maryland already has an oppressive history with the natives who occupied this land.

I facilitated a group of middle school students at City Springs Elementary School this fall. The class had a complex discussion about race and policing in the student community, and the students were able to share their personal stories. I watched their confidence rise as we discussed what it was like navigating the world with a marginalized identity.

There are stark differences between facilitating in a public school and a local organization. School systems often punish students when they should focus on reflection and growth, ultimately improving their learning environment and well-being. This bill echoes these priorities.

Social Work Advocates for Social Change is a coalition of MSW students at the University of Maryland School of Social Work that seeks to promote equity and justice through public policy, and to engage the communities impacted by public policy in the policymaking process.

Emotional healing is a necessary component of learning.¹ Restorative Practices promote neuroplasticity and student learning, allowing growing minds to retain knowledge and engage with information in a more rigorous way.² Discussing enriching topics with students in public schools can be challenging, and you can feel the remnants of certain disciplinary practices. Some priorities outlined in this bill do not complement the restorative model and should be revised.

I am in support of Restorative Practice. This bill should be amended to stay true to restorative circles and practices. MSDE should consult restorative practitioners to ensure that the plan they create and implement is culturally responsive. In restorative circles, punitive action shouldn't be and is not the focal point. All language pertaining to discipline should be rewritten to center social relationship building. Failure to abide by the standards of conduct shouldn't be met with consequences; rather, it should be an opportunity to build student and adult capacity to problem-solve collaboratively. Most importantly, everyone, including staff members, should follow and support the restorative model. With fidelity, these practices can promote a safe and healthy learning environment for all faculty and students. I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on HB0197.

¹ Wachtel, Joshua. 2013. "Guest Blog: Dr. Susan Leigh Deppe: Understanding Emotion in Restorative Practices.News." Iirp.edu. October 29. <https://www.iirp.edu/news/guest-blog-dr-susan-leigh-deppe-understanding-emotion-in-restorative-practices>.

² Alvarez, Carlos A. 2023. "The Neurobiology of Restorative Practices." Georgia Southern Commons. <https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/secsc/2023/2023/22/>.