

XHB879 Support (Written).pdf

Uploaded by: Kenzie Funk

Position: FAV



**Testimony in SUPPORT of
House Bill 879: Task Force to Improve Attendance in Absenteeism in Schools**

Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

Position: Support

March 27, 2025

At Strong Schools Maryland, we work to support the faithful implementation and full funding of the promises legislated through the landmark Blueprint for Maryland's Future. The Blueprint envisions a public school system that is built upon the foundation of equity, supports all students' success, and removes barriers to opportunities. As such, **Strong Schools Maryland urges a favorable report on House Bill 879**, which directly aligns with this vision by establishing a Task Force to Improve School Attendance and Reduce Chronic Absenteeism in Schools.

Chronic absenteeism identifies the number of students who are absent 10% or more of the school days they are enrolled at that school, including both excused and unexcused absences.¹ To effectively address chronic absenteeism, it is critical to understand the root causes. According to Attendance Works, absences generally stem from four broad categories: systemic or personal barriers to attendance, aversion to returning to school, disengagement, and misconceptions or miscommunications regarding attendance or student needs.

These root causes can manifest in various ways including transportation insecurity, biased disciplinary suspension practices, unwelcoming school climate, lack of academic or behavioral supports, undiagnosed disability or unmet accommodations, and more. The many factors influencing a child's ability to attend school often lie beyond the student's control and are the result of systemic barriers to meeting basic needs or creating a safe school environment.² This disproportionately impacts at-risk students who have been historically and systemically marginalized, including Black and Brown students, students with disabilities, and students of low socioeconomic status.

Why is chronic absenteeism harmful? We know that attendance is critical to student achievement, engagement, and fulfillment in schools. Research shows that attendance is positively related to academic achievement and is one of the earliest indicators of student engagement and belonging in the school community.³ While attendance is a powerful predictor of student success, rates of chronic absenteeism are rising at both the National⁴ and State level, with disproportionalities in the rates of chronic absenteeism for disaggregated student groups.⁵

¹ [Maryland Report Card, Definitions](#)

² [Chronic Absence, Root Causes](#)

³ [Achievement and Absenteeism](#)

⁴ [Why is School Attendance Important? The Effects of Chronic Absenteeism](#)

⁵ [Chronic Absenteeism Trends and Bright Spots](#)

Many factors can contribute to a student's ability to attend school, and, as a result, it is critical to collect data on chronic absenteeism and investigate how to support Maryland students in attending school.

House Bill 879 aligns with the goals of the Blueprint by investigating how to break down systemic barriers and implement strategies to empower students to come to school as it seeks to establish a task force to:

- Collect and analyze data including best practices, state wide trends, and local trends;
- Study and identify the factors that contribute to chronic absenteeism;
- Develop guidance and a toolkit for schools in order to improve attendance rates; and
- And promote culturally responsive and non-punitive approaches to chronic absenteeism.

The Blueprint promises to transform Maryland public schools. However, achieving this transformation requires proactive steps to address chronic absenteeism to ensure students are present and engaged in school. By supporting this legislation, we can make significant progress in breaking down barriers to school attendance and creating a more equitable and supportive educational environment for all Maryland students.

For these reasons, we urge the committee to issue a Favorable Report on House Bill 879.

Please contact Kenzie Funk at kenzie@strongschoolsmaryland.org for additional questions.

HB0879- State Board- Support- Crossover.pdf

Uploaded by: Madeline Houck

Position: FAV

TO: Senate Committee on Education, Energy, and the Environment

BILL: House Bill (HB) 879 – Task Force to Improve Attendance and Reduce Chronic Absenteeism in Schools

DATE: March 27, 2025

POSITION: Support

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) and the State Board of Education support passing **House Bill (HB) 879 – Task Force to Improve Attendance and Reduce Chronic Absenteeism in Schools.**

HB 879 Summary

HB 879 establishes a Task Force to address chronic absenteeism in schools. The proposed Task Force will consist of various stakeholders, including school officials, teachers, parents, and community representatives. The Task Force will research effective strategies, develop a statewide goal for reduction, and create resources for schools. The bill mandates that MSDE update attendance regulations based on the Task Force's findings.

MSDE Support

Given the efforts currently underway within MSDE, HB 879 would further efforts to improve attendance and address chronic absenteeism.

In September 2024, the State Superintendent established a Task Force to improve student attendance and reduce chronic absences in schools. The Task Force is made up of professionals representing various sectors within education, mental health, and community services. This diverse team brings a wealth of perspectives and expertise with a multifaceted approach to tackling chronic absences and improving student outcomes. The Task Force's charge is to identify and share successful strategies for reducing chronic absences, create a comprehensive attendance guidance document that will provide actionable strategies for schools at all levels, and offer resources for both students and schools from early intervention to intensive supports, to address the root causes of absences.

In its membership, the Task Force has a representative of the Baltimore Teachers Union, the Maryland State Education Association, a representative from Parent's Place of Maryland, a behavioral health coordinator, community school coordinator, director of student services, school counselor, pupil personnel worker, a Free State parent representative, a representative of higher education, an LEA Assistant Superintendent for Student Services, two local superintendents, elementary and secondary school principals, and MSDE staff.

The Task Force is partnering with Attendance Works to develop statewide attendance guidance, develop a toolkit with resources for LEAs, implement an attendance communication plan, institute a community of practice, and facilitate collaboration opportunities with other states.

In addition to activities related to the Task Force and its partnership with Attendance Works, MSDE has been engaged in providing chronic absences support to improve student outcomes through:

- researching trends in statewide and local data on attendance and school climate;
- reviewing school data to identify schools that have lowered chronic absences and improved attendance and determining strategies that have contributed to their success;
- identifying and addressing how school climate may impact attendance (example: impact of bullying behaviors, what contributes to school avoidance);
- utilizing the Maryland School Mental Health Response Team to provide support to school counselors and student services personnel to address challenges with attendance; and
- identifying strategies that community schools are using to reduce chronic absences.

Through these comprehensive efforts, the Task Force and MSDE, in partnership with Attendance Works, aim to create a supportive and effective framework for improving student attendance across Maryland.

The Task Force required by HB 879 can build on this work, through creation of guidelines and a toolkit that will be used by LEAs. LEAs will adopt new guidelines and practices for tracking attendance, implementing new strategies to address chronic absenteeism, and potentially updating their systems for data collection and reporting. In addition to the stakeholders already involved in this work, HB 879 adds a representative of the Senate of Maryland, a member of the House of Delegates, and a representative of the Governor's Office.

MSDE respectfully requests consideration of these comments as HB 879 is discussed and deliberated.

For further information, please contact Dr. Akilah Alleyne (Executive Director of Government Affairs) at 410-767-0504, or Akilah.alleyne@maryland.gov

NASW Maryland - 2025 HB 879 FWA - Attendance Task

Uploaded by: Karessa Proctor

Position: FWA

**Testimony before the Senate Education, Energy and the Environment Committee
March 27, 2025**

**House Bill 879: Task Force to Improve Attendance and Reduce
Chronic Absenteeism in Schools**

****Support with Amendment****

Senator Feldman, Senator Kagan, and Members of the Senate Education, Energy and the Environment Committee:

On behalf of the National Association of Social Workers, Maryland Chapter (NASW-MD) we would like to express our support for the Task Force to Improve Attendance and Reduce Chronic Absenteeism in Schools, HB 879. We also ask for one small and important amendment.

Chronic absenteeism is not a new issue in schools but has skyrocketed since the pandemic. [MSDE attendance data](#) updated in January 2025 show that it currently stands at 26.7%, 54% higher than when schools closed for the pandemic in March 2020. As Maryland remains committed to a landmark investment in public school instruction for our future citizens, it is critical that this issue be addressed. Those who are not in the classroom are not learning.

Students are motivated to attend school when the attraction to being there outweighs what gets in their way. The older they get, the greater agency they have. A report from [Attendance Works](#) updated in June 2024 puts the factors that impact school attendance into four categories: barriers, aversion, disengagement, and misconceptions. Each category requires a different response. For example, a positive school climate where students feel safe and valued, with engaging instruction that provides a vision of success in adulthood, is a critical factor in addressing disengagement. The Blueprint's Pillars 2, 3, and 4 are all aimed at creating this environment, addressing a key component in student engagement. Sadly, for many students, this is not enough to ensure that they attend.

The State of Maryland will benefit from a more detailed examination of all factors that play a role in chronic absenteeism, as well as identifying the resources currently available to address them and their impact. This information can inform the General Assembly's work going forward and support our historic transformation into world-class schools. School Social Workers, licensed educational professionals through MSDE as well as licensed health care providers under Health Occupations Code, provide specialized school-based services unique from other nursing and public health professionals as well as their school-based colleagues in school

(over)

counseling and pupil personnel services. This is why we are requesting an amendment to ensure the addition of a school social worker to the Task Force:

On page 2, after line 14, insert:

(#) one school social worker;

(#) one school-based licensed clinical social worker, registered nurse, or other school-based public health professional; and

We ask that you return a favorable report with this amendment.

Respectfully,

Karessa Proctor, BSW, MSW
Executive Director, NASW-MD

CRSD HB 879 Crossover Testimony 2025.docx.pdf

Uploaded by: Kelly Quinn

Position: FWA

MARYLAND COALITION TO REFORM SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

SENATE EDUCATION, ENERGY, AND THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

HB 879

TASK FORCE TO IMPROVE ATTENDANCE AND REDUCE CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM IN SCHOOLS MARCH 27, 2025

POSITION: FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS

The Maryland Coalition to Reform School Discipline (CRSD) brings together advocates, service providers, and community members dedicated to transforming school discipline practices within Maryland's public school systems.¹ CRSD respectfully requests a favorable report with amendments regarding HB 879, which would establish the Task Force to Improve Attendance and Reduce Chronic Absenteeism in Schools to study and recommend practices that identify, prevent and eliminate chronic absenteeism by Maryland students and require the Task Force to issue a report on December 31, 2025.

Seven years ago, pursuant to HB 429, The Morgan State University published the report "Winning Strategies on the War against Habitual Student Truancy," which is full of recommendations to address truancy across Maryland.² We appreciate that HB 879 seeks to create a taskforce to address to improve attendance and reduce chronic absenteeism in schools. We want to see action result from this bill and the report it requires. CRSD would ask the committee to consider that the aforementioned report took approximately 18 months to produce, and more time might be needed in order for the produce a quality report.

¹ CRSD has five guiding principles.

1. We are committed to the fair and equitable treatment of ALL students regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, religion, and socio-economic status, and reducing barriers to learning for ALL students.
2. We vow to work to eliminate any barriers to learning for students listed above.
3. We are committed to ensuring Maryland schools use exclusionary discipline only as a last resort and use alternatives whenever possible.
4. We are committed to advocating for the use of restorative practices in Maryland schools.
5. We imagine a broader vision of school safety, without punitive measures. We believe Maryland schools should be free of police. Working towards this goal, we will limit the power of the police to use school discipline.

² Maryland Task Force to Combat Habitual Student Truancy. "(Dec. 20, 2017). " "Winning Strategies on the War against Habitual Student Truancy," Available at https://lipa.access.preservica.com/uncategorized/IO_08fb244f-813b-4748-8759-facfd3c2ddd1/

As the aforementioned report explains, truancy can have multiple root causes and solutions should be informed by a multidisciplinary perspective. Therefore, CRSD recommends that HB 879 be amended to ensure that the following perspectives are included in the Task Force:

- Maryland Transit authority
- Direct community-based service providers who focus on school attendance
- Expertise assisting with the social and economic factors that contribute to chronic absenteeism, such as mental health providers, case managers for families experiencing homelessness, and substance use disorder treatment providers.
- The experiences of students with Individualized Education Program (IEP) plans and 504 plans
- The experiences of Superintendents and parents from rural, suburban and urban communities

Regarding the data that will be acquired and shared pursuant to HB 879, CRSD urges transparency by requiring that the Task Force disclose the data it acquires to the public in a de-identified way. This disclosure will help families and communities partner with the government towards the common goal of helping Maryland students get to school everyday.

Finally, CRSD recommends that HB879 be amended to ensure that the Task Force is sufficiently informed about the unintended consequences related to attendance data collection of students who belong to communities who are impacted by local and federal law enforcement. Solving the problem of chronic absenteeism is important, but the collection, storage, and disclosure of student data must be carefully executed to protect vulnerable Maryland students and their families.

We urge a favorable with amendments report to HB 879.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide our input. For more information, please contact the Maryland Coalition to Reform School Discipline at CRSDMaryland@gmail.com.

CRSD Members:

Sayra and Neil Meyerhoff Center for Families, Children and the Courts at the University of
Baltimore School of Law
Maryland Office of the Public Defender
Progressive Maryland
The Choice Program at UMBC
ACLU of Maryland
Public Justice Center
Disability Rights Maryland

HB0879 Howard Co BOE Testimony 032725 for EEE - At

Uploaded by: Staff Howard County

Position: FWA



**Board of Education
of Howard County**

Jolene Mosley, *Chair*

Linfeng Chen, Ph.D., *Vice Chair*

Andrea Chamblee, Esq.

Jennifer Swickard Mallo

Jacky McCoy

Meg Ricks

Antonia Watts

James Obasiolu
Student Member

William J. Barnes
*Superintendent,
Secretary/Treasurer*

**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.