



BILL NUMBER: HB 329

TITLE: Criminal Law - School Resource Officers - Prohibition on Sexual Activity with Students

COMMITTEE: Judiciary

HEARING DATE: 2/24/2026

POSITION: FAV

TurnAround, Inc. is the designated rape crisis center for Baltimore City and Baltimore County and a comprehensive domestic violence service provider, offering crisis response, survivor-centered advocacy, legal referrals, trauma-informed therapy, and community education. TurnAround also serves as the Regional Navigator for Baltimore County and Howard County, providing specialized services to survivors of human trafficking, and is a member of the Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MCASA), the Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence (MNADV), and the Maryland Human Trafficking Task Force (MDHTTF). On behalf of TurnAround, Inc., we respectfully submit this testimony in support of House Bill 329.

HB 329 strengthens Maryland's criminal response to sexual abuse by closing a critical gap in protections for students interacting with law enforcement officers assigned as school resource officers. The bill clarifies that a law enforcement officer may not engage in sexual contact, vaginal intercourse, or a sexual act with a student enrolled in a school where the officer is assigned as a school resource officer, aligning these protections with existing prohibitions for other categories of vulnerable individuals such as victims, witnesses, suspects, and persons in custody.

From our direct service experience, we know that abuse perpetrated by adults in positions of authority over children is uniquely devastating. School resource officers are embedded in school communities and often viewed as gatekeepers to safety, discipline, and access to support, which creates a profound power imbalance when interacting with students. When those entrusted to protect children instead exploit their access for sexual purposes, the harm is compounded: students may fear that no one will believe them, may be discouraged from reporting because of the officer's status, or may be pressured to remain silent to protect the reputation of the school or law enforcement agency.

Current law already recognizes that it is inappropriate and dangerous for law enforcement officers to engage in sexual acts with individuals who are victims, witnesses, suspects in an open investigation, requesting assistance, or in the officer's custody, with criminal penalties attached.

HB 329 builds on this existing framework by explicitly adding students assigned to a school where the officer serves as a school resource officer to the list of protected categories. This clarification is essential to ensure that the law reflects the realities of school-based policing and the increased vulnerability of minors in educational settings, particularly students who may already be at elevated risk of sexual abuse and trafficking due to prior trauma, family instability, or economic hardship.

Survivors of child sexual abuse and human trafficking frequently report that abuse by trusted adults in institutional settings—teachers, coaches, and other authority figures—is particularly harmful, both emotionally and practically, because those adults often control access to safety, opportunity, and basic needs. School resource officers fit squarely within this category of authority figures, given their role in school safety plans, their daily presence on campus, and their influence over disciplinary and law enforcement responses. When the law fails to clearly prohibit sexual activity between SROs and students, it risks sending the message that such abuses of authority will not be met with proportional consequences, undermining both prevention and accountability efforts.

HB 329 also aligns with best practices in preventing child sexual abuse and trafficking by making clear that the responsibility for maintaining appropriate boundaries rests with adults, not children. Adolescents in particular may struggle to recognize grooming behaviors or may interpret attention from an authority figure as a form of protection or mentorship, which predators can exploit. By codifying that school resource officers may not engage in sexual acts, sexual contact, or vaginal intercourse with students in the schools where they are assigned, the bill removes ambiguity and reinforces that any such conduct is an abuse of authority, regardless of the minor’s perceived “consent.”

HB 329 complements broader legislative efforts, such as those in SB 407, to address sexual offenses by persons in positions of authority and to ensure that Maryland’s statutory framework reflects the reality that authority figures can and do target children for abuse. Together, these reforms strengthen Maryland’s overall response to sexual abuse and human trafficking by closing loopholes that allow adults to exploit institutional roles—whether in schools, youth programs, or law enforcement assignments—to access and groom minors.

For these reasons, TurnAround, Inc. respectfully urges the Committee to issue a Favorable report on House Bill 329.

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