

February 24, 2026

To: Chair Bartlett, Vice Chair Davis, and the House Judiciary Committee

Reference: House Bill 329 – Criminal Law – School Resource Officers – Prohibition on Sexual Activity with Students

Position: FAVORABLE

Dear Chair Bartlett, Vice Chair Davis, and Distinguished Committee Members:

On behalf of LifeBridge Health’s Center for Hope, we thank you for this opportunity to provide information on House Bill 329. Center for Hope provides intervention and prevention for: child abuse, domestic violence, community violence, and elder justice for survivors, caregivers, and communities. Recognizing the devastating impact of violence in our communities, the Center for Hope provides services for over 7,700 survivors and caregivers annually—including more than 1,700 children—through forensic interviews, medical exams, therapy, case management, and advocacy.

The Center for Hope **strongly supports House Bill 329 – Criminal Law – School Resource Officers – Prohibition on Sexual Activity with Students**. As currently written, the criminal code does not include any differentiated charge or penalty for school resource officers that sexually abuse children within the school that they are currently assigned. While other statutes address abuse by those in positions of authority, House Bill 329 creates additional criminal liability for those who violate the unique power dynamic and breach of trust between School Resource Officers and students within their schools.

School resource officers are embedded in schools and interact daily with minors in disciplinary and law enforcement roles, putting them in a position of authority that, when exploited, makes it easier for perpetrators to manipulate and abuse students. Notably, sexual abuse involving authority figures frequently differs from other abuse because perpetrators can rely on their institutional power and positions of inherent trust rather than physical force to manipulate or gain control of a child. Research shows that, when an adult holds authority over a child (such as a coach, teacher, or law enforcement officer), the imbalance itself can function as coercion, making genuine consent impossible even if the subject is “over the age of consent.”¹ The legislature has already recognized the unique power dynamic that exists between police officers and those that they have detained, are currently investigating, or are witnesses in one of their investigations.² House Bill 329 does not serve as an extension of the current criminal statute, but instead closes obvious loopholes that exist

¹ Weiss K. (2002). Authority as coercion: When authority figures abuse their positions to perpetrate child sexual abuse. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 11(1), 27–51. https://doi.org/10.1300/J070v11n01_02

² MD Criminal Code 3-314

when students may be over the age of consent or no active investigations exist and provides an extra avenue for prosecuting those that violate this enhanced level of trust within Maryland schools.

For all the above stated reasons, we request a favorable report for House Bill 329.

Respectfully submitted,

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