

Senate Bill 830: Education – Alternative Schools – Reporting Requirements

Hearing Before the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

March 3, 2020

Position: Favorable

Written Testimony of Wanda Boyer

Thank you Chairman Pinsky and members of the Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to present to you today regarding Senate Bill 830. My name is Wanda Boyer and I am from Kent County Maryland. I am here today to urge you to pass this bill to create urgently needed reporting requirements for Maryland's Alternative Programs. Today, the lack of any information allows the school districts to provide sub-standard education to students who are placed in these programs.

My grandson was placed in the alternative program in Kent County. The program is known as the Kent Alternative Program, or KAP. It is run by a for-profit provider called Catapult Learning, they are paid almost \$400,000 per year for between 6 and 20 students. KAP is presented as a therapeutic program, but it is not. When my grandson was placed in the program it was presented to us as the only way to avoid an extended suspension. He was accused of threatening a teacher but we later proved that to be false. Initially, we agreed to the placement, but it was not truly voluntary. We fought the placement and won a settlement that returned my grandson to the regular classroom and removed the incident from his record.

But in the time that my grandson was in the program he was not receiving an education. I had to call the school repeatedly to have his homework sent over to the alternative class, which is only a few yards from his regular class. He went 10 days without any school work at all. Once we had some school work for him, the program did not help him catch up. I had to find someone outside of the school to get him back on track and stay on track. During the time that he was there the students were provided worksheets to fill out, that had nothing to do with the classes they needed to graduate.

My professional work is with a psychological services program, so I understand the difference between therapeutic and punishment. The KAP was nothing more than punishment. There are students that remain in KAP for 4 years, with no education and no support.

The only reason that KAP can exist is because there are no State requirements for alternative programs. This has to change, and I am asking you to make sure no other student is cheated out of an education because no one is responsible for how these alternative programs are run.

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