



SB 830 – Education – Alternative Schools – Reporting Requirements

Committee: Education, Health and Environmental Affairs

Date: March 3, 2020

POSITION: Support

The Maryland Coalition of Families: Maryland Coalition of Families (MCF) helps families who care for someone with behavioral health needs. Using personal experience as parents, caregivers and other loved ones, our staff provide one-to-one peer support and navigation services to parents and caregivers of young people with mental health issues and to any loved one who cares for someone with a substance use or gambling issue.

MCF strongly supports SB 830.

Many students who have mental health or substance use disorders end up in alternative schools. Often this is the result of inadequate behavioral health treatment. They may have received no treatment at all, or insufficient treatment. The fact that they have a behavioral health disorder should not prevent students from receiving a good education, but for students placed in an alternative school, a poor education is frequently the consequence.

My son, who had significant mental health problems, was placed in two alternative high schools. His mental health disorders manifested themselves internally – he was an extreme self-injurer and needed therapeutic supports during the school day. He said of his education: “since I was not throwing desks across the room, I got an “A.” While he learned some things in a few of his classes, for the most part he felt that his education was virtually non-existent. In addition, he did not have access to an array of career- or college-readiness courses. Despite his high IQ, after graduation he failed in Community College and struggled for years in low-paying jobs.

We have a little data – students who are coded with an “Emotional Disability” under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) have the highest drop-out rate of any disability group, and they are the most likely of any disability group to be in an alternative school.

For these reasons, it is imperative that SB 830 be passed. Alternative schools need to be held accountable for their programs in a way that they have not in the past. Not only does academic achievement matter, important too are the array of courses offered, the mental health and counseling services available, opportunities for extracurricular

activities, and the use of restraint and seclusion. Only when this information has been collected can the performance of alternative schools be measured and improvements begin to be made.

Students with mental health and substance use disorders deserve a good education too.

We urge a favorable report on SB 830.

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