



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE

## Anne Arundel County Branch

*"Freedom Fighters for a New Century"*

### Executive Committee

**Jacqueline Boone Allsup**  
President

**Antonio Downing**  
1<sup>st</sup> Vice President

**Claudia Barber**  
2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President

**Dr. Mary Dadone**  
Secretary

**Ralph Thomas**  
Treasurer

February 19, 2020

### **Anne Arundel County Branch of the NAACP opposes HB 535 Anne Arundel County Public Schools - Preventive Measure Unit Pilot**

My name is Steven Waddy I am the Political Action Chair of the Anne Arundel County Branch of the NAACP. I am testifying today on behalf of the Maryland State Conference of the NAACP, under the leadership of President Willie Flowers.

On February 14<sup>th</sup>, the Anne Arundel County Branch of the NAACP testified before the Anne Arundel County Delegation in opposition to HB 535.

#### **I. The Branch expressed concerns with negative unintended consequences with disproportionate impact on black, brown, and neuroatypical children.**

The NAACP is concerned that without further definition the bill can lead to additional segregation and disproportionate and bias-based removal of students of color from the traditional classroom. The NAACP has been at the forefront of dismantling the school to prison pipeline and the organization views this bill as a possible return to the zero tolerance policies that fueled the pipeline. In 2005, the NAACP entered into a memorandum of agreement with the Anne Arundel County Public School System to resolve a complaint that the NAACP filed on behalf of parents and concerned citizens regarding the "vast educational disparities between students based on race."<sup>1</sup> The parties agreed to accomplish several goals, one of them being that the school system would "Determine whether there are racial disparities in imposing disciplinary measures (suspensions, extended suspensions and expulsions) upon students."<sup>2</sup>

#### **Racial disparities in this highly segregated school system still exist.**

According to 2018 data from the US Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights, Black students in AACPS are 3.5 times as likely to be suspended as White students.<sup>3</sup> Hispanic students are 1.3 times as likely to be suspended as White students. Just this past September the majority Black, Meade High School was in the news for being disproportionately targeted for

---

<sup>1</sup> Mediated Agreement Between the Anne Arundel County (MD) Public School System and the Anne Arundel County NAACP, et al. September 7, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Id at Pg 8

<sup>3</sup> Miseducation: Is there Racial Inequality at Your School? Pro Publica, 2018.  
<https://projects.propublica.org/miseducation/district/2400060>

arrests in school by County Police.<sup>4</sup> The data released from the County stated that students at MacArthur Middle School which feeds Meade High School were also being cited by the Police at disproportionately high rates. The NAACP has continued to consult with AACPS and the County Police on their policies and is adamant about the use of less punitive measures to address problematic behavior.

The NAACP recognizes that the reduction in African American students being suspensions, expulsions, and in school arrests is not simply about the numbers. The organization does not want to see an increase in the surveillance, monitoring, and stigmatization of African American students as a result of an increase in zero tolerance policies that this bill is seeking to implement. The Kirwan commission calls for more wraparound services for students and increased funding for nurses and mental health practitioners. AACPS has recognized the need for more assistant principals at the elementary and middle school level to address behavioral concerns. The school climate would also be improved if the system hires more Black teachers that are trained in how to de-escalate problems using conflict resolution, and have the social and emotional skills to address problematic behavior.<sup>5</sup> Schools should be instituting restorative justice practices that help to give students agency in holding each other accountable for their behaviors. Evidence suggests that the training of teachers and administrators in restorative justice is lagging and needs to be seen as a more urgent need.

## **II. The NAACP is concerned about the lack of coordination with existing programs meant to maintain an effective learning environment and to support children at risk.**

The NAACP believes that this legislation would duplicate initiatives already in place in AACPS. Following the massacre in Parkland High School and a rash of other mass shootings, the State Legislature passed the Safe to Learn Act of 2018. The Safe to Learn Act required that school systems appoint mental health services coordinators, School Resource Officers, School safety coordinators, and School Safety Assessment teams. The law even requires that the Kirwan commission include recommendations for mental health and wraparound services in local school systems and funding for those services.<sup>6</sup> AACPS has indicated to the community that this bill would duplicate the duties and responsibilities of the Division of Student Support Services.<sup>7</sup>

The Board of Education of Anne Arundel County is also updating its policies in accordance with State law. In January 2019 the Board updated the policy on exclusion, seclusion, and physical restraint.<sup>8</sup> In July of 2019, the School Board updated their Student Behavioral Threat Assessment in accordance with the Safe to Learn Act.<sup>9</sup>

In conclusion, the goals of this bill are laudable. We applaud the urge to reduce instances of violent behavior in the classroom and provide services for students who may be experiencing traumatic episodes. However, this bill is duplicative and may encourage unintended

---

<sup>4</sup> Students at majority-black Meade High 3 times as likely to face a rest in school than the rest of Anne Arundel, Lauren Lumpkin, Sept. 05, 2019. <https://www.capitalgazette.com/education/ac-cn-meade-high-school-20190905-b5onjm2ixngddjlx75oxwx73oq-story.html>

<sup>5</sup> Zero Tolerance and Bias Reinforce the School-to-Prison Pipeline, David Osher, Dec. 21, 2015. <https://www.air.org/resource/zero-tolerance-and-bias-reinforce-school-prison-pipeline>

<sup>6</sup> The Safe to Learn Act, SB 1265, Chapter 30. 2018.

<sup>7</sup> Pilot Program would create prevention group to help Anne Arundel Middle School Students, Chase Cook, Capital Gazette, Mar. 6, 2019.

<sup>8</sup> Board of Education of Anne Arundel County, STUDENT BEHAVIOR INTERVENTIONS -EXCLUSION, SECLUSION, AND PHYSICAL RESTRAINT, Issued July 13, 2016, Revised, Jan. 9, 2019. [http://aacpschools.org/boardpolicies/wp-content/uploads/bsk-pdf-manager/2019/01/JK-RA-Student-Behavior-Interventions-2018.FINAL\\_.pdf](http://aacpschools.org/boardpolicies/wp-content/uploads/bsk-pdf-manager/2019/01/JK-RA-Student-Behavior-Interventions-2018.FINAL_.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Board of Education of Anne Arundel County, STUDENT BEHAVIORAL THREAT ASSESSMENTS, Aug. 21, 2019. <http://aacpschools.org/boardpolicies/wp-content/uploads/bsk-pdf-manager/2019/08/FINAL-JN-Student-Threat-Assessments-Policy-2019.pdf>

consequences despite the underlying positive intent and potential of HB 535. We urge a no vote on HB 535.