

EQUITY FOR ALL KIDS



To: Chair Kaiser and members of the Ways and Means Committee
From: Shamoyia Gardiner, Education Policy Director
Re: House Bill 535: Anne Arundel County Public Schools – Preventative Measure Unit Pilot Program
Date: February 19, 2020
Position: Oppose

For several years, the General Assembly has been taking steps to modify punitive, exclusionary, and disproportionately impactful disciplinary policies and practices in the State's public schools. Suspensions and expulsions of public school students from prekindergarten through 2nd grade were banned. Longitudinal data on student discipline and youth incarceration is being collected for analysis. An entire Commission on the School-to-Prison Pipeline and Restorative Practices was formed and has made recommendations—some of which can become law as soon as this year. ACY urges this committee not to undermine that progress by passing HB 535.

Children in middle school grades are generally between the ages of 11 and 14. Fraught with hormonal changes, social pressures, and the development of an identity, middle school is a uniquely challenging time for many students. The results of the 2017 Maryland Youth Risk Behavior Survey for middle school students revealed that 29.2% had carried a weapon, 52.3% had been in a fight, 18.4% had used an e-vaping product, and 21.7% were already drinking alcohol.

Each of these activities, if conducted on school premises, where middle school students spend a large portion of their day, could lead to disciplinary action being taken against the student, despite how relatively common these behaviors are. Interestingly enough, the survey also revealed that 45.4% of respondents got fewer than eight hours of sleep each night, 21.2% of boys had a concussion, 59.8% of girls had skipped breakfast the entire week prior to the survey, and while **21.3% of students had ever thought seriously about killing themselves, 14.1 had made a plan about how to do it, and 8.5% were unsuccessful in their attempt to carry that plan out.**

HB 535 is not a clear piece of legislation, though it is clear that it does not seek to address the actual needs of students. It does not define the phrases "increased monitoring and attention", "individualized networking", or "behavioral, social, or legal difficulties in or out of school", fails to specify the role of school-based staff in proceedings, does not specify the exact process for serving students under its proposed pilot program, nor does it define roles in the school system's collaboration with its local police department and mental health agency. The bill also has an appallingly simplistic "effectiveness" reporting requirement. **ACY urges an unfavorable report.**

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