

January 18, 2021

RE: HB 171
Maryland House of Delegates
House Ways and Means Committee
6 Bladen St.
Annapolis, MD. 21401

Testimony, In Support - HB 171 – MSDE – School Discipline – Data Collection

Good afternoon committee members.

I am the parent of a child with multiple challenges and disabilities. He has been bounced between 504 plans and IEP plans over the course of 8 years within the AACPS school system.

During that time, it has become increasingly harder to track his progress and performance as a student with disabilities, as some student records are often missing, inconsistent or incomplete. And part of that data includes discipline issues that arise while at school, on the bus or on school grounds.

As if the special education process is not difficult enough for families and students, factors like a lack of a reliable and consistent data sets further complicates our ability to advocate for appropriate accommodations and supports to help us protect our children during the school year.

Students with IEP's are protected by IDEA and ADA laws, which guarantee that a student's progress be tracked by all the members of a student's IEP team. There does not appear to be a consistent policy to protect the civil rights of these students when it comes to discipline. Students with Section 504 Accommodation Plans have even fewer protections. And many incidents go underreported or without any reporting by school system personnel. Oversight is lacking in these areas, as Section 504 plans are administered at the school system level, so discipline, progress data are not consistently or accurately tracked by the local school systems with fidelity, nor diligently overseen by the Maryland State Department of Education.

Discipline practices including, seclusion and restraint, occur every day in schools across the nation and involve students from all demographic groups. They disproportionately affect groups with minority children and children with disabilities. These practices have been shown to be detrimental to the growth, development and overall mental and physical health of students.

Therefore, it is important for all stakeholders to require MSDE to track school discipline, student progress and resulting student outcomes as the result of the use of such practices. And in the interest of transparency, to make that data available to the public, and to the Maryland State Legislative bodies.

Please return a favorable report on HB 171 so that MSDE will be tasked with accurately tracking the use, and results of the use of discipline, in our schools across the entire state of Maryland.

Thank you for considering my testimony in support of HB 171.

Mr. Richard Ceruolo
Parent and Advocate for Students with Disabilities | Parent Advocacy Consortium