



HOMELESS PERSONS REPRESENTATION PROJECT, INC.

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SUPPORT – HB 700

Education - Disruption of School Activities - Repeal of Prohibition

House Ways and Means Committee

February 10, 2021

Testimony of Homeless Persons Representation Project

Chairperson Kaiser, Vice Chair Washington, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of House Bill 700, on behalf of the Homeless Persons Representation Project (HPRP). HPRP is a nonprofit legal services organization that provides free legal representation to those at risk of or experiencing homelessness, with the ultimate goal of ending homelessness in Maryland.

HPRP supports HB 700 because it is a key step in reducing the criminalization of our students and reducing youth homelessness. Currently, the law permits the students to be charged with a misdemeanor crime for “disturb[ing] or otherwise willfully prevent[ing] the orderly conduct” of school activities. Md. Code, Education, § 26-101(a). Rather than supporting students’ learning, this approach creates lifelong penalties that disproportionately impact Black, Indigenous, and youth of color, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth.

School disruptions often occur when students are traumatized. These traumas include homelessness, abuse, neglect, and violence at home and in communities. Caroline Miller, *How Trauma Affects Kids in School*, Child Mind Institute, <https://childmind.org/article/how-trauma-affects-kids-school/> (last visited Feb. 8, 2021). Rather than supporting students who face these challenges, Maryland currently compounds their trauma by punishing the students. These punishments inflict greater developmental damage and increase rates of school dropout. J. Stuart Ablon, Ph.D., *School Discipline is Trauma-Insensitive and Trauma-Uninformed*, Psychology Today, (Jan. 9, 2020), <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/changeable/202001/school-discipline-is-trauma-insensitive-and-trauma-uninformed>.

When students drop out of school, they have a 346% higher risk of experiencing homelessness than youth with at least a high school degree. Christina Dukes, *Strengthening Partnerships Between Education and Homelessness Services*, United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (May 3, 2018), <https://www.usich.gov/news/strengthening-partnerships-between-education-and-homelessness-services/>. It is imperative that we stop pushing students out of school and into homelessness through policies that penalize students.

HPRP urges the Committee to interrupt this cycle of youth homelessness by issuing a favorable report on HB 700. Thank you for your consideration. Please contact Sam Williamson at 443-961-5586 with any questions.