

Written Testimony in SUPPORT OF House Bill 496

*House Ways and Means Committee
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I am an Administrator in Montgomery County Public Schools and I support House Bill 496. This bill is one of many steps to ensure that all children regardless of their race, perceived ability, or socioeconomic status is guaranteed a quality public education. This bill is the beginning to the end of criminalizing student behavior: It removes a vehicle by which Black, Brown, and Indigneous students, and other students of color, and those with Special Needs, are pushed out of classrooms and into the criminal justice system.

There is no empirical data to support that School resource officers work to mitigate behaviors and to keep the classroom environment safe. If anything, having police presence in schools leads to an increase in arrests for child-like behaviors, creating unwarranted trauma for those students arrested. Here are some statistics:

- ***School Resource Officers criminalize children behavior:*** According to a national study, students in schools are five times more likely to be arrested for subjective behaviors like “disorderly conduct” and twice as likely to be arrested for fighting without weapons than schools without police.
- ***School Arrests are disparate against Black children:*** In the district where I grew up and taught for 12 years, Howard County, the arrest data for Black students is alarming. Only 24% of HoCo students are Black, but they make up 64% of SRO student arrests,
- ***School Arrests are disparate against students with special needs:*** In Montgomery County where I now am an administrator, 25% of school based arrests are students with special needs, when only 12% of the school population have IEPs.

The disproportionality is stark and cannot be ignored.

Instead, the state of Maryland should seek to create healthy school environments in pre-K through 12th grade by fully funding alternative and proven methods of improving school climate such as *restorative practices, increased mental health services, and social emotional learning programs* in the earlier grades.

Restorative practices move us away from conversations on discipline, to how to build, repair, and nurture relationships between students and staff. Staff use community circles and one on one conversations to build a safe and positive learning community.

- ***Restorative practices neutralizes the school to prison pipeline:*** Restorative practices have been observed to lower suspension and expulsion rates. Suspensions and expulsions are correlated to incarceration later in life.
- ***Restorative practices promote community and meaningful dialogue:*** Students learn how to problem solve and resolve conflict through guided conversations.

Social emotional learning (SEL) programs are an approach to teaching where students and adults acquire and then use the knowledge and skills necessary to manage their emotions, set goals, and build positive relationships. This has been found to be beneficial especially in the earlier grades:

- ***Social emotional learning is supported by teachers:*** According to a Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning commissioned survey, 93 percent of teachers want a greater focus on social, emotional learning.
- ***Social emotional learning improves grades, test scores, and attendance:*** Because of the positive attitudes towards self and others, and the lessened stress in the school environment, there has been a correlation between a 11 percentile increase in test scores and the implementation of Social Emotional Learning.

Furthermore, the state should fund increases to mental health supports. School counselors and school psychologists are able to provide students with someone to talk to, can equip them with tools to manage their emotions, and can help teach students how to build healthy relationships.

- ***The experts support an increase in school counselors:*** According to the American School Counselors Association, it is recommended that schools provide a ratio of 250 students to one school counselor
- ***The experts support an increase in school psychologists:*** According to the National Association of School Psychologists, it is recommended that schools provide a ratio of 500 to 700 students to one school psychologist.

In closing, I support HB 496. In order for our youngest students to learn, they need to be in school as much as possible. This legislation will provide for a safe school climate, while at the same time protecting our students from the effects of the School to Prison Pipeline. I urge the committee to deliver a report of favorable for this bill.