



February, 28 2021

Maryland House of Delegates
House Ways and Means Committee

In Support of HB 1089: Primary and Secondary Education, Police-Free Schools Act 2021

Good day members of the House Ways and Means Committee.

Many in the disability rights community support reforms of the way students are serviced within our schools. And encourage approaches that do not treat students like criminals for behaviors that are typical for most students. Too often School Resource Officers, or police officials are called into school buildings to handle behavioral incidents which do not meet the standard of “imminent danger”.

Too often our children are placed in handcuffs for minor infractions of school rules. Too often these children are black, or brown or may have undiagnosed disabilities. And too often this is the step that leads them down the road toward negative outcomes. What kind of students are we creating in our schools, if we arrest them for behavior related to being a teenager? Or are experiencing a manifestation of their disability? Or for getting overwhelmed by the circumstances of their daily school routine? We need more Mental Health Services in schools, not more police officers.

An IEP is a document that is filled with supports and services for students that need help during the school day. Too often these services and supports are not delivered with fidelity during the school day. And as a result, these children are not having their needs met daily by their teachers and members of their school’s support staff. This can have negative results like heightened levels of frustration or frustration. In many cases this heightened frustration leaves them in a state of “fight, or flight”. Leading incidents of additional trauma, serious injuries, or in some extreme cases even leading to death.

The student is not a bad seed for simply not possessing the coping mechanisms to meet the many challenges of their day. Opportunity; this is the time for trained behavioral specialists, or school psychologists to intervene, not time for a pair of handcuffs. We need more humane, trauma-informed, Social / Emotional school supports to assist with behavioral issues. Not more school cops in schools.

The school to prison pipe line is real and is a continuing concern among many across the state. And we hope to change this trend by working in concert with our house delegates and state senators. More counselors, more school psychologists and supportive services can be brought in to service these students instead of treating them like problem students that need to be dealt with, or made to be more compliant. Let’s all work to bring more humanity back into education, by using positive behavioral approaches to help students, and use fewer law enforcement involved approaches.

Please support HB 1089 and return a favorable report.

Thank you for your time, and for considering my testimony today.

Mr. Richard Ceruolo
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