



SENATE BILL 119 Education – Crimes on School Grounds – Application

February 3 2022

POSITION: SUPPORT

The Choice Program at UMBC strongly supports SB119 – Education – Crimes on School Grounds –Application, introduced by Delegate Sheila Ruth and Senator Mary Washington. We urge the House Ways and Means Committee to issue a favorable report on this bill.

Maryland’s legal system brings children and youth–disproportionately Black and Latinx young people–to the attention of law enforcement and the Department of Juvenile Services. Far too often, children of color are over-policed in schools. According to Maryland State Department of Education’s report, [Maryland Public Schools Arrest Data](#) for School Year, 2019-2020, there were **2,484** arrests in Maryland’s school systems. **Seventy-five percent** were Black/African American or Hispanic or two more races. Maryland Education Code *Arrests on School Premises* is one example of laws that perpetuate the School-to-Prison pipeline in Maryland. These laws result in adverse life chances for some of the youngest members of our communities. Existing education law specifically–Maryland Education Code § 26-101–is overly broad because it criminalizes a wide range of behaviors, many of which are based on the subjective interpretations of school officials, educators, school resource officers, and school police officers.

For nearly 35 years, The Choice Program at UMBC has served Maryland youth who are systems-involved. In FY 21, we provided engaging programming, resource brokering and holistic case management to **656** young people who were under the supervision of the Department of Juvenile Services. Choice serves as an alternative to the school-to-prison pipeline; our primary goal is to reduce the number of Black and Latinx young people who are entangled in the youth legal system. Our model seeks to dismantle racist structures and, instead, employs strengths-based approaches focused on positive relationships and their agency. These guiding principles are essential in addressing racial inequities at an individual and systemic level. We hold high expectations for youth and parents as well as high levels of support.

This session is an opportune time to decriminalize disruptive behavior in Maryland's education system. It's time to invest in student wellness and public health programs that directly engage young people's emotional, social, and cultural needs, especially during the ongoing trauma of the global pandemic.

The Choice Program respectfully urges your support for SB 119, the repeal of Section 26–101 15 Annotated Code of Maryland.