



BILL: House Bill 214
TITLE: Juveniles – Reportable Offenses
HEARING DATE: February 2, 2022
POSITION: SUPPORT
COMMITTEE: Judiciary Committee
CONTACT: Mrs. Ardath Cade, Legislative Representative (410-991-9383)
Ms. Patricia Ursprung, Deputy Legal Counsel (301-766-2946)

The Washington County Board of Education supports House Bill 214, which was introduced in previous years at our request. The issue it resolves relates to students under the custody of the Maryland Department of Juvenile Services (DJS) who place the students in group homes as part of their adjudication, and then present the students for enrollment in the local school system where the group home is located.

Concern

Students in the custody of DJS, who are being educated in a Juvenile Services School, are periodically transferred from the Juvenile Services School to a group home before returning to their home communities. In these situations, DJS enrolls the student in the public school system in the county where the group home is located. When DJS enrolls the student, the only information that DJS provides to the school where the student is temporarily enrolled is grades, course numbers, and an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), if applicable. This is not enough information to determine the full academic and social-emotional needs of the student.

Proposed Legislative Amendment

This bill would require DJS to provide the school system, to which the student is temporarily transferring, with information about the student's reportable offense, the student's gang affiliation, if any, the disposition of the reportable offense, and, most importantly, any educational programming and related services provided to the student. Currently, DJS does not provide any of this information to the receiving school. All of this information, which would be available only to the superintendent and school principal and otherwise kept confidential, is needed in order to develop an educational plan that both accommodates the student's needs and also provides for the safety of the student and others.

It is important to note that DJS places students in group homes as a temporary placement. In virtually every case, the plan is for students to return home to reenroll in a school in their home county. The school in the student's home county is entitled to this information under the current language in Education Article 7-303, and DJS has access to the information as well. As it currently stands, only the school in the county where the temporary placement occurs is NOT privy to this important information.

Need for this Amendment

Current law does not specify what happens when a student is in the custody of DJS and DJS places the student in a group home, which is often located in another part of the state from their home county, prior to returning home. In Washington County, this results in DJS placing students in one of several different group home settings throughout our county.

For each of these students, the home county school and the DJS placement facility has access to the information requested in this legislative amendment, but the school system where the group home is located gets only grades, course numbers, and an IEP, if the student has one. This is simply not enough information to develop an appropriate plan to ensure success for the student.

This bill seeks to close this information gap. It would enable the school system where a student is temporarily enrolled to receive necessary information in order to develop an educational plan that will best meet the needs of the student and ensure that the safety of all students and staff is considered. The student's information would only be released to the local superintendent and the school principal—NEVER to teachers or other school personnel who do not have a need to know—therefore maintaining student confidentiality and ensuring that the student is treated fairly by school staff members, is given a fresh start, and has an opportunity to succeed.

In Washington County, we have found that we typically receive only grades and a list of schools and programs where the student has been placed; however, many of the students are facing significant challenges outside of the school setting that are impeding their ability to receive an education. This bill would enable school systems to receive the necessary educational and wrap-around services information so that it can develop an educational plan for each student that will best meet the needs of the student. The school system can implement specific strategies to create an environment for the student that is conducive to learning and success. For example, the student may need the services of a social worker or a health-care professional. If a student is to be successful, it is important to provide the student with the necessary services and an educational setting that is free of distractions. Providing such services to the student will promote a safer school environment for all students and school staff.

In summary, we need your help to ensure that schools have the necessary information to develop an educational plan for these students that provides for the needs of the student, educationally and emotionally, and minimizes further disruptions to the student's already impacted education.

We urge the committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 214.

Thank you.

cc: Washington County Board of Education Members
Washington County Delegation to the Maryland General Assembly
Dr. Boyd J. Michael, III, Superintendent
Dr. Peggy Pugh, Associate Superintendent for Administration and Leadership
Dr. Gary Willow, Associate Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction
Mr. Jeffrey Proulx, Chief Operating Officer
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