



## **Policy Foundation of Maryland**

**Committee:** Ways and Means

**Testimony on:** HB0472 - "Primary and Secondary Education – Title IX – Policies and Procedures (Hear Our Voices Act of 2022)"

**Sponsor:** Delegates J. Lewis, Bartlett, Boyce, Cardin, Cullison, Foley, Fraser-Hidalgo, Henson, Hill, Howell, Jalisi, R. Jones, Kaiser, Kelly, Landis, Lehman, Lierman, Love, Luedtke, McComas, McIntosh, Proctor, Qi, Reznik, Terrasa, Valentino-Smith, and Williams

**Organization:** POLICY FOUNDATION OF MARYLAND

**Person Submitting:** Sarahia Benn, Executive Dir. of Policy Foundation, Member of MD Legislative Coalition

**Position:** Favorable

**Hearing Date:** February 10, 2022

Mrs. Chairwoman and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for allowing testimony today in support of HB0472. Policy Foundation of Maryland is a grassroots organization focused on State and County level legislation and policies that impacts marginalized communities and veterans affairs. Educational legislation is of massive importance to these communities particularly due to how impacted these communities have been historical and currently. The Maryland Legislative Coalition is an association of activists - individuals and grassroots groups in every district in the state. We are unpaid citizen lobbyists and our Coalition supports well over 30,000 members.

On December 8, 2021 I witnessed approximately half of the students unified, walk out of [Aberdeen high School Over Alleged Sexual Assaults](#). Now the school has its side but the victims have theirs and the Female Student survivors were never heard due to conflicts of interests within the Aberdeen School system. Imagine a proper system of policies, procedures, and avenues made public and transparent to students and their parents? Would this circumstance have happened and would these children have had to even walk out to be heard?

Whether in the headlines or in your community it is common to hear of some kind of sexual misconduct incidence. K-12 schools and college sexual assault and misconduct is

a rampant issue that is being taken more seriously in recent times because it is a nationwide issue but also a Maryland-wide issue. Sexual misconduct represents a catastrophic failure of protection to victims particularly since educators and administrators are entrusted as being that line of trust to their students, not protection for the system.

Sexual misconduct is a broad term that can encompass any behavior from inappropriate comments, jokes, and/or sexual intercourse. Consent is an agreement between two equals. The student-teacher relationship is not an equal relationship nor can any other inappropriately involuntary relations. [Studies show that 1 in 5 women and 1 in 16 men are sexually assaulted during college.](#)

HB0472 will require that the Maryland State Board of Education, by March 31, 2023 must develop policies and procedures for reporting, administering, investigating, and resolving complaints related to incidents of sexual misconduct and violations of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. It will also authorize a person to be able to bring a civil action against a local system that fails to comply with certain policies and procedures and to be able to recover damages, reasonable costs, and attorney's fees. This policy reform is overdue. Imagine how many sexual assault and misconduct victims of Maryland's school systems has went without some kind of justice or being heard?

As an educator, I always knew that my responsibility was not just to educate but was also to protect my students.

For these reasons we urge you to vote **favorably** for **HB0472**.

Respectfully submitted,



Sarahia Benn

(Policy Foundation of Maryland, Member of Maryland legislative Coalition)

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**(Dedicated to Black History Month & Survivors)**

“When one person says, 'Yeah, me, too,' it gives permission for others to open up..”

— **Tarana Burke.**