

Testimony to the Ways and Means Committee
In support of
House Bill 23: School Discipline-Data Collection and School Resource Officers.
January 20, 2022

Strong Schools Maryland urges a favorable vote on House Bill 23: School Discipline-Data Collection and School Resource Officers.

The Blueprint for Maryland's Future envisions a world-class system of public schools for our state's students. In all the Kirwan Commission's research on international best practices in education, no empirical evidence supported the use of exclusionary discipline to create world-class schools. In fact, the Learning Policy Institute noted in 2019 that "zero-tolerance school discipline policies that apply strong punishments-such as suspension and expulsions-for nonviolent and subjective offenses [...] often result in negative consequences for student academic achievement, attainment, and welfare."¹

House Bill 23 would:

- Require the Maryland State Department of Education to accessible to the public, disaggregated disciplinary data at the state, school system, and individual school level. This act of transparency would make advancing educational equity more practicable by ensuring student groups who are disproportionately punished are easily seen when evaluating data;
- Lower the ratio for identifying "high-suspending" elementary and secondary schools and the threshold for action from 3 to 2, which holds the state, school systems, and individual schools to a higher standard of addressing the needs of students with disabilities; and
- Prevent school resource officers from taking unilateral action to enforce school discipline policies, rules, regulations, or procedures, which further clarifies the role and authority of school resources officers in schools.

Maryland's legacy of disproportionately suspending and expelling Black students and students with disabilities, often at at least twice the rate they exist in the general population, is well-documented, despite the current lack of comparable year-to-year data. The ongoing global coronavirus pandemic and resulting shifts in policy and practice for students and school communities will continue to impact their behavioral health and coping mechanisms in ways we cannot completely understand at present.

By being diligent in the criteria development, collection, and reporting on how students are treated in schools, we can put Maryland's school communities and policy makers in a strong position to learn from our practices and make better choices in the future. The intent evident in Houe Bill 23 is necessary if we hope to create the world-class schools the Blueprint envisions, and we urge a favorable report.

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¹ [Learning Policy Institute, May 2019.](#)