



TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

HB 146 Education – Reportable Offenses and Student Discipline - Alterations

POSITION: Support

BY: Nancy Soreng – President

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The League of Women Voters of Maryland (LWVMD) **supports House Bill 146**, which alters the definition of “reportable offense” to include only offenses that occurred off school premises and not at a school-sponsored event, and establishes a uniform process for responding to a reportable offense. It requires that an offense be reported to school officials following adjudication or conviction, reduces the number of reportable offenses, and requires the Maryland Department of Education (MSDE) to issue a yearly report on reportable offenses, among other provisions.

Research has documented the central role of school discipline policies and practices in shaping the educational opportunities and life chances of students, particularly students from low-income and historically underserved populations. Being removed from school for disciplinary reasons is associated with school disengagement, low graduation rates, increased dropout rates and increased involvement with the criminal justice system, (i.e., the school-to-prison pipeline). Given the negative impact that removing a student from school can have for individuals and their communities, data on student removal for reportable offenses must be transparent and easily accessible to families, educators, the public, and policy makers. Unfortunately, current procedures lack this transparency, a problem that HB 146 seeks to correct.

Currently, Maryland law requires police to report to schools when a student is arrested in the community for any one of 50 offenses. This bill will limit the offenses that can be reported to schools and defines reportable offense as an offense that occurs off school property. Importantly, it changes the point of reporting from *arrest* to a finding of delinquency or a conviction. This is an important correction since the majority of arrests are resolved before any petition is filed in court.

Unlike accountability measures for suspensions and expulsions, there is very little due process or accountability measures in place to govern the removal of students from school for community arrests, resulting in the removal of some students with very little due process. HB 146 would improve accountability for student removal for reportable offenses by (1) requiring school systems to follow existing school discipline procedures, and (2) requiring the Maryland State Department of Education to collect and publish

data on student removals, the demographics of students being removed, and the reasons for removal.

The LWVMD has a long-standing history of support for an equitable and accessible educational system. In that vein, public policy needs to move away from criminalizing student behavior to developing policies and practices that keep them out of the criminal justice system. HB 146 would be an important step in that process.

The League urges the committee to give a favorable report to House Bill 146.