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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony in Support of HB 1152 - Public Schools - Student Bill of Rights and Prohibitions on Suspensions and Expulsions

HB 1152 is legislation necessary to secure the rights of students in Maryland classrooms. There are two key portions of the bill: the creation & codification of a student bill of rights, and the elimination of suspensions and expulsions for non-violent offenses committed by students.

Elimination of Non-violent Suspensions & Expulsions

The first portion of the legislation would make suspensions and expulsions for non-violent student offenses illegal. Here in Maryland and across the country, teachers frequently remove students from classrooms for non-violent reasons, passing these issues on to school administrators who will either suspend them, or, depending on the severity of the infraction, may refer them to a school resource officer for arrest. Some key data on this issue include:

- The total number of in-school and out-of-school suspensions and expulsions in Maryland is steadily rising. Before the onset of COVID-19, there was increase of over 3,000 removals in just three years (76,000 in 2016 to 79,000 in 2019)
- More than one-third of out-of-school suspensions are given to students for disrespect or disruption.
- About half of in-school and two-thirds of out-of-school suspensions are given to Black students, who make up only 33 percent of Maryland's public schools. Black students are also arrested at disproportionately high rates in Maryland schools.

The *Maryland Commission on the School-to-Prison Pipeline and Restorative Practices* found that exclusionary discipline and other zero-tolerance practices are ineffective in reducing disruptive behavior; and instead negatively impact educational outcomes and the overall learning environment. HB 1152 will keep our kids in the classroom – and reinforce the a key tenet of the Blueprint: that every student deserves the right to a world-class education.

Student Bill of Rights

The second portion of the bill establishes a student bill of rights in Maryland code. This is modeled off of a policy that was adopted in [San Antonio, Texas](#), as well as similar measures in other areas across the country. The bill states that each Maryland student at a public school has several important rights; including:

- The right to a safe, caring, and welcoming school environment;

- The right to a school in which all students are accepted regardless of background or differences;
- The right to a student voice so that the student's ideas and opinions are heard and considered and the student is given an opportunity for self-expression;
- The right to consistent and equitable discipline practices;
- And several others.

Combined, both elements of this legislation create a strong framework for codifying the rights of students, and ensuring they have every opportunity to receive a complete education. For these reasons, I respectfully request a favorable committee report on HB 1152.