



**House Ways and Means Committee
HOUSE BILL 0146
Reportable Offenses:
Education – Reportable Offenses and Student Discipline – Alterations**

February 3, 2022

SUPPORT

The Choice Program at UMBC strongly supports HB 146 Reportable Offenses and Student Discipline introduced by Delegates Moon and Atterbery. We urge the House Ways and Means Committee to issue a favorable report on this bill.

For nearly 35 years, The Choice Program at UMBC has served Maryland youth who are systems-involved. In FY 21, we provided engaging programming, resource brokering and holistic case management to **656** young people who were under the supervision of the Department of Juvenile Services; we served **850** young people in total. Choice serves as an alternative to the school-to-prison pipeline; our primary goal is to reduce the number of Black and Latinx young people who are entangled in the youth legal system. Despite a year of Covid in which we offered remote services, Choice mentors contacted young people **24,455** times via video, text, phone calls for visits, goal setting activities, job searches, homework help, games, community service, and wellness checks. Choice serves as an alternative to the school-to-prison pipeline; our primary goal is to reduce the number of Black and Latinx young people who are entangled in the youth legal system. Our model seeks to dismantle racist structures and, instead, employs strengths-based approaches focused on positive relationships and their agency. These guiding principles are essential in addressing racial inequities at an individual and systemic level. We hold high expectations for youth and parents as well as high levels of support. Maryland's legal system disproportionately ensnares Black and Latinx young people, limiting their life chances in education, vocation, civic engagement, and health and wellbeing. A punitive criminal justice system does not offer young people developmentally appropriate and culturally responsive interventions; it exacerbates stubborn inequities. This session offers the chance to remake our youth legal system to reduce racial and ethnic disparities.

All students deserve the opportunity to learn, regardless of their circumstances outside of school. Currently, Maryland law requires police to report to schools when a student is arrested off of school grounds, in the community for any one of more than 50 offenses. Schools across the state have used this law to remove students with very little due process, even if the arrest had nothing to do with school. In Maryland, there are virtually no limitations on schools' authority to remove students for reportable offenses. We know all too well that suspensions and expulsions also have an adverse effect on students' wellbeing because they become disconnected from their education for **alleged** behavioral incidents outside of school. HB 146 directs school systems to follow existing school discipline procedures for general education students and special education students if they propose to remove a student from school based on a reportable offense.

The Choice Program respectfully urges your favorable support for HB 146.