



HB1183 ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS - PREVENTIVE MEASURE UNIT PILOT PROGRAM

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APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

OPPOSE

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Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS) opposes **HB1183 Anne Arundel County Public Schools - Preventive Measure Unit Pilot Program**. This bill establishes the Preventive Measure Unit Pilot Program in Anne Arundel County to establish preventive measure units in elementary and middle schools to monitor students who have behavioral, social, or legal difficulties through increased monitoring and attention and individualized networking with community programs, schools, students, and parents. It requires that the program be conducted during the 2023-2024 and 2024-2025 school years. The bill also requires a report on the effectiveness of the program to the General Assembly.

While well-intentioned, this legislation would result in an unfunded mandate that unnecessarily encroaches on local board authority and local school system decision-making.

The legislation would require AACPS to work with the County Police Department and the County Mental Health Agency. However, AACPS already has a very collaborative relationship with both agencies and this relationship does not need to be legislated. This information was shared with the sponsor of the bill when it was originally introduced during the 2020 Legislative Session. In fact, AACPS worked with the Education Subcommittee to significantly amend the bill, at that time, to address the district's concerns and align with AACPS priorities and mental health initiatives. In 2020, the Delegation voted to support the bill as amended by the Education Subcommittee. Unfortunately, none of those amendments were included in this year's reintroduction of the bill. The sponsor has shared amendments to the bill which AACPS is currently reviewing.

AACPS has several concerns with the proposed legislation as introduced. First, the intent of the legislation is unclear. This bill would establish a "Preventive Measure Unit Pilot Program" but it does not specify what the Program would seek to prevent. Accordingly, it would be difficult for the Board to report as to the effectiveness of the Program as the purpose of the Program is unknown. Another concern with the legislation is the requirement that the school district hire a staff person for each of the three or four participating middle schools. The type of position to be hired is not identified in the bill. Due to the lack of specification in the bill and what it aims to prevent, it is difficult to determine what staff would need to be hired. For example, would AACPS need to hire addiction specialists, psychologists, or counselors? This is also unclear. Regardless, such a requirement creates an unfunded mandate, which AACPS opposes.

The funding, or lack thereof, for the three positions is problematic. Because AACPS does not know what the Program is seeking to prevent, it is difficult to quantify what that funding would have to be in order to hire the appropriate staff. There is also concern that the positions created have the potential of being

permanent and this would result in the costs being permanently absorbed by AACPS. Again, this creates an unfunded mandate, which AACPS opposes.

It is important to note that in 2018, the Maryland General Assembly passed the Maryland Safe to Learn Act. That law addresses several school safety issues, including safety evaluations and behavior threat assessments, staff training, and school policy on behavior threat assessments. AACPS supported that legislation and played an integral role in the development of the law. In fact, Superintendent George Arlotto and AACPS staff were part of the group that developed the State model policy for behavior threat assessment, which school systems have since adopted. As such, the creation of the Program in this bill could result in overlap with the work the district is already doing in the implementation of the 2018 law in conjunction with current AACPS programs. For example, AACPS has already implemented positive behavioral interventions and supports, and restorative practices in our schools. These programs help to improve student behaviors and achievement for all students by establishing a consistent approach to managing behavior and encouraging clear and positive behavioral expectations.

In addition, the Blueprint for Maryland's Future establishes the Maryland Consortium on Coordinated Community Supports (Consortium) to develop a statewide framework for the creation of coordinated community supports partnerships to meet student behavioral health needs and other related challenges in a holistic, nonstigmatized, and coordinated manner. The Consortium must also develop best practices for the creation of a positive classroom for students.

Finally, attached please find text from a recent article in the Capital Gazette which highlights the existing partnerships AACPS has with community stakeholders. This article is further proof that such collaborations do not need to be legislated.

Accordingly, AACPS respectfully requests an **UNFAVORABLE** Delegation vote on HB1183.

Anne Arundel prosecutor's office aims to hire social worker to steer juveniles toward help

By DAN BELSON
CAPITAL GAZETTE |
FEB 25, 2022 AT 4:41 PM

Using federal grant money, the Office of the State's Attorney for Anne Arundel County is hoping to reduce school expulsions and juvenile crime by hiring a social worker who would connect at-risk youth with support services.

A social worker hired under the State's Attorney's Office's new Juvenile Justice Therapeutic Crisis Intervention program, funded by a U.S. Department of Justice's Innovation Prosecution Solutions grant of nearly \$178,000, will seek out students suspended from the county's public schools and assist them with resources in an attempt to keep expulsions and juvenile incarceration down, county State's Attorney Anne Colt Leitess said.

The prosecutor said she has been trying to secure funding for the office to hire a youth-focused advocate for years, following her time on juvenile trial teams where she said she "started to see the trajectory of how kids get into trouble.

"The one indicator that's very, very clear is when kids start to get into trouble at school," Leitess said. That can be a sign of at-home pressures, such as physical abuse or trauma, which can lead to juvenile delinquency behaviors, she added.

More than 6,000 of the 80,000-plus students at Anne Arundel County Public Schools faced in- or out-of-school suspensions during the 2019-20 school year, according to data collected by the Maryland State Department of Education. The previous school year, before the COVID-19 pandemic canceled in-person classes, there were more than 9,500 suspensions.

During the 2020-21 school year, when most students were learning at home, 82 county students were suspended. Each year, just about half of those suspensions are for attacks, threats or violence. Under the program, schools would send information on the program to families of students who are suspended from public schools, and families could voluntarily sign on to get connected to resources, such as mental health evaluations and therapy.

While the prosecutor's office may use other data in the future to find at-risk youth, they are starting out by using school suspensions to identify students who may be most at risk of committing crimes in the future.

Throughout the county school system, administrators regularly use a variety of student information, including disciplinary records, to identify pupils who need additional support, Anne Arundel County Public Schools spokesperson Bob Mosier said.

That's with the "overarching theme" of providing services to get kids on the right track, he added. Leitess noted that by the time juvenile cases reach her office, the youth involved already has a prior record. Diverting them earlier, while they're in the sixth to ninth grade, can keep them from becoming involved in the justice system in the future, she said.

"If you're doing poorly in school, it's kind of like the 'canary in a coal mine.' It's a warning sign to us that it's time to intervene," Leitess said.

The grant requires that each month, the advocate gives counseling and mentorship to a total of 20 students and connects them to “holistic services, such as the Anne Arundel County School’s behavioral support services, mental health evaluations and treatment, and trauma informed therapy,” according to the Justice Department.

Leitess said her office wasn’t sure if they would “have the buy-in” from the county’s school system, but has since had a series of meetings setting up plans for the project. Her office also is working with the county police department, which sends its own crisis intervention team into schools.

This fiscal year, only 23 other jurisdictions received the Department of Justice’s competitive innovative prosecution grants, which aim to reduce crime by encouraging local-level prosecutors to use data in public safety initiatives. Anne Arundel County was the only Maryland jurisdiction to receive a grant during the past round of funding.