TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

HB 23 School Discipline – Data Collection and School Resource Officers

POSITION: Support

BY: Nancy Soreng – President

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The League of Women Voters of Maryland (LWVMD) **supports House Bill 23.** We strongly support the bill's provisions to strengthen efforts to promote data transparency and accessibility in Maryland and the additional measures to identify "high suspending" schools and lower the risk ratio currently used to identify a school as high suspending. We further support extending the discipline reporting requirements to include alternative schools and programs, and public separate day schools. These provisions, together with prioritizing disproportionality in discipline, will strengthen reporting practices, enhance the accessibility of data, and provide a better method of identifying high suspending schools.

While we generally support limits on school resource officers, we have reservations about the provisions prohibiting a school resource officer from "unilaterally" enforcing discipline-related school policies, rules, regulations or procedures. It's unclear how effective or meaningful this provision will be, and it may be difficult to enforce.

A primary reason to have access to discipline data is that *school discipline policies and practices are a central factor in shaping the educational opportunities and life chances of students*, particularly students from low-income and historically underserved populations. The Maryland Commission on the School-to-Prison Pipeline and Restorative Practices—a body created by the General Assembly and comprised of a diverse group of educators, parent representatives, and school discipline experts—documented the continued disparities in the use of exclusionary discipline in Maryland Public Schools.[1] Research on exclusionary discipline in Maryland shows that:

- 60% of out-of-school suspensions (OSS) are Black students, even though Black students make up only 35% of public school enrollment in Maryland.

- Students with disabilities represent 13% of enrollment in Maryland public schools but 25% of out-of-school suspensions.

- School OSS rates for Black students are twice as high as OSS rates for White students.

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[1] Maryland Commission on the School-to-Prison Pipeline and Restorative Practices, Final Report and Collaborative Action Plan **(**December, 20, 2018), https://www.law.umaryland.edu/media/SOL/pdfs/Programs/ADR/STPP%20%20RP%20Commission%20Final%20 Report.pdf.

- The highest school suspension rate is for students with disabilities, with schools suspending on average 9.5% of their students with disabilities. [2]

While the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) currently prepares reports on school discipline, these reports are of limited usefulness for several reasons: reports are hard to find, data is contained in several different reports, disproportionality data is not reported at the school level, and data is reported as frequencies which masks disproportionalities. For example, a district may suspend 10 students with disabilities over the course of a year. This may not seem like a lot, but if enrollment of students with disabilities is just 50 students, that means that 20% of all students with disabilities were suspended.

HB 23 addresses these concerns around school discipline data collection and dissemination and will ensure that this data is reported in an accessible format, allowing easy access for the community, advocates and researchers to drill down on specific areas of interest. It will ensure that school discipline data is disaggregated by subgroups that have historically been disproportionately impacted by out of school discipline practices.

By extending discipline reporting requirements to alternative schools and programs and public separate day schools, ***HB 23 closes a gap in reporting requirements and encourages accountability for the use of punitive and exclusionary practices.*** Research found that alternative schools in Maryland are among the schools with the highest suspension rates.[3]

HB 23 also includes using an additional measure to identify "high suspending" schools and lowers the risk ratio currently used to identify a school as high suspending. ***These provisions would provide a better method of identifying schools that consistently disproportionally suspend students based on race/ethnicity, disability status, and English language ability.*** It would also provide an impetus for schools to assess their disciplinary practices to determine why suspensions rates are high, identify where there are disparities, and adopt and implement more effective practices.

Addressing disparities in school disciplinary practices begins with data access and transparency. HB 23 will strengthen reporting practices, enhance the accessibility of these data for additional stakeholders, and provide a better method of identify high suspending schools.

The League urges the committee to give a favorable report to House Bill 23.

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[2] Sunderman, G. L. & Croninger, R. (2018). *High suspending schools in Maryland: Where are they located and who attends them?* College Park, MD: Maryland Equity Project, The University of Maryland. https://education.umd.edu/sites/education.umd.edu/files/MEP_High%20Suspensding_Oct%202018.pdf

[3] Ibid.