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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES

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Testimony in Support of HB23 – School Discipline - Data Collection and School Resource Officers

HB23 represents a recommendation from the Maryland Commission on the School-to-Prison Pipeline and Restorative Practices that will expand the accessibility of school discipline data and lower the threshold used to identify schools that disproportionately suspend subgroups of students. This bill will also clarify the role of School Resource Officers in our classrooms.

Improving Accessibility of Discipline Data:

To effectively address the disproportionate use of school suspensions, we need to require transparency in the data that conveys the current use of school suspensions. Therefore, data about discipline actions should be transparent, detailed, and accessible to policymakers, researchers, educators, and the public.

Currently, MSDE's school discipline data reports do not meet these qualifications. Data is reported only as a PDF document with a pre-existing set of categories. These "data dumps" limit comparisons across schools and districts and make it difficult to analyze the predictors or causes of suspensions. Making this data available in downloadable spreadsheets would greatly enhance the use of this data for both researchers and the public to better understand and reduce the use of suspensions in Maryland schools.

Identifying Disparities in School Suspension:

HB23 also sets more ambitious targets for reducing racial disparities in the use of school suspensions. According to MSDE's suspension report from the 2018-2019 school year, over 76% of out-of-school suspensions were given to students of color.

Lowering the risk ratio threshold from 3.0 to 2.0 for identifying schools with high disproportionality in their school discipline practices will contribute to increased efforts to improve equity in school discipline. The risk ratio compares the removal rate of each student group in a school to the removal rate of a comparison group in the school. To calculate this ratio, the removal rate of a student group is divided by the removal rate of all other students in the comparison group.

Removing SROs from the Disciplinary Process

HB23 would also prohibit any school resource officer from enforcing discipline-related school policies, rules, regulations, or procedures - further clarifying the roles of officers in our schools and preventing unnecessary removals from classrooms. Routine school discipline should be handled by school administration and support staff - not police.

Adopting more ambitious standards for measuring disproportionality in school discipline will ultimately facilitate a stronger dialogue about the consequences of disciplinary actions for different populations of students, and promote positive school climates that foster higher academic achievement.

This bill was passed unanimously through the Ways & Means Committee last year, and through the house on a 130-6 vote. For these reasons, I respectfully ask for a favorable report on HB23.