

Senate Education, Energy & the Environment Committee

March 22, 2023

House Bill 185: Nonpublic Schools and Child Care Providers – Corporal Punishment – Prohibition

*****SUPPORT*****

The National Association of Social Workers – Maryland Chapter – represents social workers across the state. We strongly support HB 185, a bill intended to close a loophole and protect children by eliminating use of corporal punishment in nonpublic schools and child care settings.

Corporal punishment, which has now been outlawed in 63 countries, is defined as the deliberate infliction of pain as retribution for an offense, or for the purpose of disciplining or ‘reforming’ a wrongdoer. Corporal punishment finds its roots in ancient civilizations as a means of imparting punishment not just on children but also adults. However, we no longer permit public floggings, nor the beating of prisoners, and it has been well over a hundred years ago that a man’s right to flog an ‘errant wife’ was overturned. Ironically, today it is only children – those we profess to love the most - who can be hit with impunity, short of inflicting an injury.

Numerous studies have conclusively found that physical punishment is overwhelmingly more likely to have negative long-term consequences than positive effects. While Maryland law permits parents to exercise reasonable corporal punishment, the practice was banned in Maryland public schools in 1993. The time is long overdue to assure the same standard of protective care for all Maryland children by eliminating corporal punishment in every school and child care settings without regard to public or private status.

Adults have the right to live free from the risk of physical harm. While we do not yet consider children to be individuals in their own right and deserving of the same protection, HB 185 is a much needed step in the right direction to assure the same protection from corporal punishment in school and child care settings for all of Maryland’s children.

By eliminating use of corporal punishment in private schools, Maryland has the opportunity to be a national leader in that only two states – Iowa and New Jersey – ban this nonsensical and potentially damaging practice. Our children are counting on your support.

Judith Schagrin, LCSW-C
Co-chair, Legislative Committee