

I am disheartened by the efforts to pass Prohibited Behavior on School Grounds and Property-application. While I fully understand the arguments, I disagree. This is the worst possible time to pass this Bill (HB615 cross-filed SB0512) and I oppose it for the following reasons:

As a former teacher, I believe I have more insight into this subject than most. I taught in Prince George's County for 20 years and I believe I know what it is like to face threats of physical danger on a regular basis for myself and for the students who faced this along with me. From my viewpoint, we cannot wait until a student is so out of control that they do harm to themselves or others before we act. In order to send a strong message that certain behaviors will not be tolerated, we (adults) must all be on the same page. It is easy for you and others to make these judgements because you are not there to witness or experience these things. I am talking about the psychological harm that is being done to those who go to school to teach and to learn only to be prohibited by others' behavior to do so. It is not pretty and it is not fun and it makes getting up and going to school more difficult. That is one reason more teachers are leaving. But even if they do, I worry about the students who go to school to learn and are confronted by unruly behavior of others on a daily basis.

Those who favor this Bill speak about the psychological harm that is being done to those to whom it is being applied. What of the victims who experienced real trauma by having these things perpetrated on them day after day, week after week? As a teacher, I cared about all of my students, maybe even a bit more for those who were troubled. I did my best to help them by trying to show them the best way to behave and not get into trouble. I referred students for counseling, but, to tell you the truth, there are not enough counselors in the world for the number of students (and their parents) who have problems and tend to take those problems out on innocent victims. Children who go to school to learn and teachers who go to school to teach, should feel safe in their environment.

I am highly insulted when those defending this Bill use race as a means to push it through. To argue that teachers are misunderstanding students' behavior because of their color is ridiculous. For every child who does exhibit disruptive and threatening behavior, there are many more children of that same color who do not. The color of their skin might be an explanation for why they are frustrated and angry due to things outside of their control (and ours), but it is not a teacher's reason for trying to teach them how to behave and to keep them from interfering with the learning process. I don't believe that most teachers are threatened by a Black student any more than a white student, yet this is another popular argument and one that is both insulting and untrue.

I once had a child psychologist who told me that pitying a child for their circumstances and allowing them to get away with unruly behavior was one of the worst things you could do to a child. If you really care about these troubled children, as I do, you will want to help them and not give them excuses which will only send them into deeper trouble.

I would like to point out that the school system I worked for had many interventions for handling misbehaviors which were preventative and restorative. As for children with disabilities, there are 504 plans and I.E.P.'s which have built-in accommodations and teachers are strictly required by law to adhere to them. However, give the people who are on the front lines some credit. There comes a time when a teacher or school system has used up all of their interventions to no avail. There comes a time when things are spiraling out of control and someone is about to be hurt. You are asking us in those instances to wait until someone is seriously hurt before we call for help. Of course, not every action or threat warrants this, but we have had enough experience to know when it is time. Please help teachers keep children safe. Let us do our job by doing yours.

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