



THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony in Favor of SB-512, Prohibited Behavior on School Grounds

Mr. Chair, Madame Vice Chair, and members of the Education, Energy & the Environment Committee:

As it currently stands in law, a public-school student can be arrested for “disrupting school,” even if no other crime has been committed in MD. This means if the teacher decides to involve law enforcement, the student in question could be handcuffed and taken to the local police station.

This concept of legal ramifications for a routine disciplinary issue is not only disproportional, but feeds into the serious ongoing social issue of what social scientists call the “school-to-prison-pipeline.” This phenomenon can be defined as a collection of policies and systems which funnel students out of schools, increasing the likelihood of criminal behavior and probability of future imprisonment.

The school-to-prison pipeline disproportionately affects students of color due to implicit bias in the classroom. According to researchers at Yale, implicit bias in teachers cause them to see black students as misbehaving more than white students, even when exhibiting the same behavior. This pattern stretches back to even pre-school students, showing the impact this racial bias has on students during early childhood education.

That said, when misbehavior is criminalized, the outcomes of that bias have serious consequences. This racialized aspect of the school-to-prison-pipeline, combined with the criminalization of routine disciplinary issues, funnels students of color into the juvenile justice system even more than they already are, contributing to crime and the prison population.

These students who are misbehaving need guidance and support from school staff, not the cold chill of a jail cell and a mark on their criminal record. This is why I have introduced SB-512, to make the, often redundant and unnecessary, charge of “disrupting school” not apply to students. In doing so, it helps prevent implicit bias from ruining a child’s future for something that should not be criminalized in the first place.

This bill would protect the future of the next generation from being needlessly put on the path toward a life of crime and have the schools deal with simple misbehavior instead of law enforcement.

It is for these reasons that I respectfully request a favorable committee report.