

SUPPORT HB1400 Student Use of Force - Authorization

MARYLAND ALLIANCE FOR JUSTICE REFORM

Working to end unnecessary incarceration and build strong, safe communities



To: Chair Vanessa Atterbeary and the House Ways and Means Committee
From: Jennifer Zito and Bill Carlson, MAJR Executive Committee
Date: March 6, 2024

The Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform (MAJR - www.ma4jr.org) support HB1400 to authorize the use of force for self-defense by students in Maryland schools. This will help to reduce the "School-to-prison pipeline."

It is unjust to discipline a student who is simply defending themselves when physically attacked on school property. HB1400 is a straightforward bill which simply calls for the school administration to conduct an investigation of such incidents and prohibit discipline if it is found more likely than not that the student used reasonably necessary force.

The report of the Maryland Commission on the School-to-Prison Pipeline and Restorative Practices, an 18-month study established by HB1287 (2017), found that (pg. 22) "The school-to-prison pipeline is facilitated through a combination of factors: ... overly harsh ... discipline policies and practices". HB1400 will reduce at least one example of the use of these overly harsh school discipline policies and practices, punishing children for their reasonably necessary self-defense.

The Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform (MAJR) is a nonpartisan, all-volunteer organization of nearly 2000 Marylanders who advocate for sensible, evidence-based legislative and policy changes in Maryland's correctional practices. MAJR thanks you for the opportunity to provide input on this important legislation and urges the committee to give HB1400 a favorable report. In addition, we also urge you to support HB1257 (Restorative Practices Schools – Establishment which appeared before your committee on February 28, as we believe that bill offers a comprehensive solution to the very real problems this bill addresses.