



THE CHOICE PROGRAM AT UMBC

THE SHRIVER CENTER

**House Ways and Means Committee
SB 1145**

DATE: March 27, 2024

POSITION: OPPOSE

The Choice Program at UMBC respectfully opposes SB 1145 which would permanently ban children from attending a public or a nonpublic school (that receives State funds) in-person if they have been convicted or adjudicated as a juvenile sex offender. This will inevitably result in further disparities, disproportionately adversely affecting the life chances of young Marylanders who are Black, Latine, and/or live with disabilities. We believe that with proper community-based support, treatment, and resources, all youth have the ability to succeed.

Please prioritize the legal rights and educational needs of all children and oppose SB 1145, an unnecessary bill that is not supported by research or data. As colleagues from the Maryland Office of the Public Defender have noted, this bill, if passed, will violate students' due process rights and the rights of students with disabilities; it is not necessary as there are other statutory protections in place; and it will likely cause significant and unnecessary harm to students. SB1145 permanently denies students access to in-person instruction, negatively affecting such outcomes as educational attainment, future employment, civic engagement, and health and well being. As we learned during the pandemic, virtual school can lead to greater social isolation and weaker social ties, as well as academic setbacks.

The Choice Program has served Maryland youth who are systems-involved for more than 35 years. Presently, Choice works with young people and their families in Baltimore City as well as Baltimore, Howard, Prince George's, and Montgomery Counties. Young people often remind us that their past trauma—and worst mistakes—should not define them. Choice serves as an alternative to the school-to-prison pipeline. Our primary goal is to reduce the number of Black and Latine young people who are ensnared in the youth legal system. Our model seeks to dismantle racist structures and, instead, employs strengths-based approaches focused on positive relationships and youth agency. We hold high expectations for youth and parents as

well as high levels of support. These guiding principles are essential in addressing racial inequities at an individual and systemic level.

This is a charged, nuanced issue that deserves greater deliberation and examination than the bill received in the Senate. We call upon our elected officials to recognize that the youth who are demonized in our current public discourse are humans who deserve supportive services especially including in-person education.

We maintain community repair and wellbeing depends on a vision of public safety that rejects the impulse to punish and banish children who have been adjudicated or convicted of a sexual offense. This session offers the chance to recognize the importance of rehabilitation and to reduce racial and ethnic disparities especially for children and young adults.

For these reasons, The Choice Program opposes SB1145.