
MARYLAND COALITION TO REFORM SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

EDUCATION, ENERGY, AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE
HOUSE BILL 157
EDUCATION – SAFE SCHOOLS FUND - GRANT ALLOCATIONS
POSITION: OPPOSE
January 28, 2025

The Maryland Coalition to Reform School Discipline (CRSD) brings together advocates, service providers, and community members dedicated to transforming school discipline practices within Maryland’s public school systems. CRSD is committed to the fair and equitable treatment of ALL students regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, religion, and socio-economic status, and reducing barriers to learning for ALL students. **CRSD opposes HB 157**, because it exacerbates **funding inequalities among Maryland’s districts**, **fails to address the existing shortcomings of the Maryland School Safety Center (MSCC)**, and **does not encourage LEAs and grantees to prioritize evidence-based practices**.

HB 157 allows LEAs who have already spent their grant allotment to receive additional funds, rather than supporting all LEAs to receiving funds to make their schools and students safer. The demands on district office staff are high, and the Maryland Center for School Safety (MCSS) should be required to provide more supports, including building relationships with every district, communicating grant deadlines, and working collaboratively with district and school staff to ensure that ALL LEAs have the opportunity to use their funds in a way that reflect the most recent research and national best practices. This bill exacerbates existing funding inequities for our schools.

HB 157, and MCSS exacerbates poor practice by permitting (and implicitly encouraging) schools to spend grant funds on Police and School Resource Officers (SRO). MCSS’s last Audit included many negative findings, including insufficient documentation and a lack of written policies and procedures.¹ MCSS’s approach to school safety is exacerbating the practice that **regular police presence makes schools less safe, not more, particularly for black children and children with disabilities**. Furthermore, we request more transparency on which LEAs have applied for funds, how these funds were spent. Numerous studies have concluded that police presence in schools does not prevent school shootings or prevent other school-based violence² Furthermore, Black students receive 56% of school arrests in Maryland,

¹ <https://dls.maryland.gov/pubs/prod/NoPblTabPDF/MCSS23.pdf>

² Caitlin Moe & Ali Rowhani-Rabar, What We Know About School Mass Shootings Since Columbine and How to Prevent Them (2019).

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even though they are only a third of the student population, and research has found no differences in student behavior across race.³ Students with IEPs receive 23% of school arrests in Maryland, even though they are only 12% of the student population.⁴ Ultimately, students arrested in school are 22 percentage points more likely to drop out than peers who share similar characteristics but do not face arrest⁵

Instead, MSCC should expand student mental health services, wraparound supports, and restorative practices, which are more effective at keeping schools safe. Alternatively, MSCC should support LEAs in applying for funds for infrastructure projects, such as upgrading door locks, school entrances and offices, and building communication systems. Schools can employ proven strategies to keep students and educators safe without causing harm. Restorative Practices, for example, build positive relationships within school communities, facilitating the prevention and resolution of conflict and resulting in decreases in suspensions and improvements in school climate.⁶ Additionally, trauma-informed practices help to minimize fight-or-flight responses for students who have suffered trauma, preventing behavior crises and making schools feel “safer” and “calmer.”⁷ But to implement these measures, schools need counselors, social workers, psychologists, restorative practitioners, and community school coordinators – and in Maryland, they have far from enough.⁸

In short, HB 157 exacerbates funding inequalities among Maryland’s districts while failing to support LEAs in applying for funds that will ACTUALLY make our schools, students, school staff, and communities safer.

For these reasons, CRSD strongly opposes HB 157.

For more information contact:

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CRSD Members

³ Id.

⁴ Id.

⁵ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4192649/>

⁶ https://nepc.colorado.edu/sites/default/files/publications/Revised%20PB%20Gregory_0.pdf

⁷ https://traumasensitiveschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/TLPI-Final-Report_Full-Report-002-2-1.pdf.

⁸ https://www.aclu.org/sites/default/files/field_document/030419-acluschooldisciplinereport.pdf