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Legislative District 10
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Education, Energy, and the
Environment Committee
Energy Subcommittee

Chair, Joint Electric Universal
Service Program Workgroup



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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 68
Public Schools – Restorative Practices Schools – Comprehensive Plan

Education, Energy and the Environment Committee
January 29, 2024

Chair Feldman, Vice-chair Kagan, members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you on SB 68 Public Schools - Restorative Practices Schools - Comprehensive Plan. The bill has three main objectives: 1) redefines the term “restorative approaches” with “restorative practices”; 2) mandates the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to create a comprehensive plan and 3) establishes that if local school boards decide to implement restorative practices, they must use the plan that was established by the state.

A restorative school program is a school-wide effort to create a positive, relationship-focused learning environment which promotes respect, community, responsibility, accountability, and empowerment among students and staff. It is not a mental health, discipline, attendance, human resources, instructional, or curriculum program. Instead, restorative practices are a proactive method to conflict resolution which have been shown to improve school climate and narrow disparities between students of all backgrounds.

Maryland public schools are afflicted with a variety of problems from rising truancy to falling graduation rates and conflicts between students and teachers. Improving student wellbeing and student-teacher relations has been a priority for the State since the Blueprint for Maryland's Future was enacted in 2021. In this legislation, the Blueprint established the Maryland Consortium on Coordinated Community Supports (MCCCS) to focus on meeting student behavior health needs in a holistic, non-stigmatized, and coordinated manner. The Consortium was tasked with developing best practices for the creation of a positive classroom for all students. Additionally, schools were also required to appoint mental health services coordinators within each school to provide these services and ensure the competence of trained staff.

SB 68 builds off the work of MSDE by building a foundational framework for determining what a restorative school looks like, how it trains its staff, and what metrics a restorative school would use to determine success. In its development, MSDE would consult educators and administrators who have established and operated restorative practice schools, establish model

training materials and develop the intended outcomes and performance metrics that the use of restorative practices are designed to achieve. Further, SB 68 provides the local county boards the framework they need to implement restorative practices schools, should they elect to do so.

Restorative practices schools are not new to Maryland; there are a number of which already in place. A Johns Hopkins analysis of the 15 Baltimore City schools using restorative practices found suspensions were reduced by 44% in the program's first year. After five years of restorative practices, school arrests were reduced by 81% - indicating a reduction in violent behavior and a major step towards closing the school-to-prison pipeline. A nationwide study by the RAND Corporation corroborated these results, finding that students in restorative schools were suspended less frequently, suspended for shorter durations, less likely to be suspended multiple times, and referred fewer students to alternative schools compared to non-restorative schools. RAND also found that restorative schools narrowed the disparity in suspensions of Black, Latino, low-income, and students with disabilities, who are suspended at more than twice the rate of their peers in non-restorative schools. These findings are indicative of the impact restorative practices have on students' conduct and the learning environment. Restorative schools reduce the likelihood of dysfunctional behavior and in turn, improve students' and teachers' perceptions of school safety and learning.

Restorative practices do not just improve conduct-- they also foster a positive classroom culture and strengthen educators' connections with their students. Baltimore City Public Schools found that restorative practices improved educators' perceptions of teaching, improved the classroom climate, and increased the respect students gave to all members of the classroom community. In Baltimore City, 72% of school staff reported an improvement in school climate and 69% reported an improvement in students' respect for one another after integrating restorative practices.

SB68 provides the framework to implement Restorative Practices, as a whole, with the creation of a comprehensive plan that would provide a statewide model. For these reasons, I am requesting a favorable report on SB68.

With kindest regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Benjamin T. Brooks".

Benjamin Brooks