



THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony in support of SB 155 - Higher Education - Disciplinary Records - Use in Admissions and Disciplinary Proceedings

The admissions process should be a gateway to opportunity, not a barrier shaped by systemic inequities.

Senate Bill 151 addresses an urgent issue: the use of high school disciplinary records in college admissions decisions, a practice that disproportionately affects minority and low-income students and perpetuates cycles of exclusion. This vital piece of legislation represents a bold step toward addressing systemic inequities that hinder access to higher education for marginalized students. By eliminating the requirement for high school disciplinary records in the admissions process, SB 151 ensures that Maryland's public colleges and universities evaluate students based on their potential and academic merit rather than past punitive measures disproportionately impacting minority and low-income communities.

High school disciplinary records often reflect the pervasive racial and socioeconomic disparities entrenched in our educational and disciplinary systems. Research demonstrates that Black students face disciplinary measures at rates three to four times higher than their white peers for comparable infractions. Similarly, students from low-income backgrounds are more likely to encounter harsher punishments for minor offenses. These inequities are compounded when higher education institutions use disciplinary records in admissions decisions, perpetuating systemic barriers to college access.

The statistics speak for themselves. Nationally, 26% of Black students report having faced suspension for minor infractions within a three-year period, compared to just 2% of white students. LGBTQIA+ youth, students with disabilities, and Native American students also face disproportionate disciplinary actions, exacerbating educational disparities. These patterns not only reflect institutional biases but also limit opportunities for upward mobility, undermining the principle of education as an equalizer.

Senate Bill 151 seeks to rectify these inequities by prohibiting Maryland's public higher education institutions from requiring the disclosure of high school disciplinary records during the admissions process, with limited exceptions for academic dishonesty. This policy aligns Maryland with national trends championing fair and inclusive admissions practices, such as the 2021 decision by the Common Application to remove questions about disciplinary history.

By shifting toward holistic admissions, Maryland's colleges and universities can focus on assessing applicants' potential, academic achievements, and contributions to their communities. Students who might otherwise be deterred from applying due to fear of judgment or stigma will be empowered to pursue higher education. Removing this barrier also sends a powerful message: youthful mistakes should not define an individual's future or their access to education.

Furthermore, this bill builds on Maryland's precedent of advancing equity in education, such as the "Ban the Box" legislation of 2020, which removed questions about criminal history from initial college applications.

Education should unlock doors, not close them. SB 151 reaffirms Maryland's dedication to justice, equity, and the transformative power of learning. By passing this legislation, we send a clear message that all students, regardless of their background or past, deserve the chance to pursue their dreams.

For these reasons, I urge a favorable report on SB 151.