
MARYLAND COALITION TO REFORM SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE HOUSE BILL 523 COUNTY BOARDS OF EDUCATION - ROOT CAUSES OF CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM AND EXPULSION - INVESTIGATION AND REPORTING

February 12, 2025

POSITION: SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS

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. We are committed to making discipline responsive to students’ behavioral needs, fair, appropriate to the infraction, and designed to keep youth on track to graduate. **CRSD urges a favorable with amendment report on HB 523**, which would require county boards of education to investigate and report quarterly on root causes of chronic absenteeism and expulsion in the county.

Chronic absenteeism is a national problem, and it remains an even more severe problem in Maryland. The latest federal data from School Year 2021-2022, showed that 29.7% of students nationwide were chronically absent from school.¹ According to the Maryland Report Card, Maryland’s chronic absenteeism rate is 26%; Moreover, for the latest reported school year, throughout Maryland 15.3% of elementary students, 16.6% of middle school students, and 27.6% of high school students missed more than 20 days of school. These numbers represent significant improvement and we are hopeful that attendance will continue, as it has, to improve in these post-pandemic years.²

HB 523 would require county school boards to investigate eight potential root causes for a student’s chronic absenteeism and expulsion and report the results of their investigation to the county delegation and relevant committees. CRSD supports the efforts of this body to understand why students are missing school and being expelled as demonstrated in HB 523. With our collective experiences and research, CRSD is concerned that without some amendments HB 523

¹ Elvie Blad, “High Absenteeism Hits More Schools, Affecting Students With Strong Attendance, Too,” Ed Week. <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/student-absenteeism-remains-at-a-crisis-level-but-shows-signs-of-rebounding/2023/10>.

² Maryland Report Card, “Attendance, Absent More than 20 Days,” Last view on Feb 10, 2025. <https://reportcard.msde.maryland.gov/Graphs/#/Demographics/AbsenteeRate20/3/99/1/6/99/XXXX>

could miss crucial information needed to acquire the understanding that it is intended to foster. Specifically, we recommend that HB 523 be amended to require county school boards to include in their investigations and reports the following information:

1. A student's socioeconomic status,
2. Whether the student is experiencing homelessness,
3. A student's race/ethnicity,
4. A student's gender,
5. A student's primary language spoken at home,
6. A student's disability status (e.g. IEP and Section 504),
7. Which, if any grades, a student has repeated,
8. History of prior in and out-of-school suspension and number of days of removal,
9. Whether the student has submitted a bullying report. And if so, how many.

By including this information the reviewers will be better able to ascertain any disparate treatment that may be influencing rates of chronic absenteeism and expulsion.

Additionally, we recommend that HB 523 be amended to ensure investigations are initiated in an equitable manner and to acknowledge families' right to provide or withhold informed consent to participate in said investigation.

Seven years ago, pursuant to HB 429 The Morgan State University published the report "Winning Strategies on the War against Habitual Student Truancy" which is full of recommendations to address school truancy across Maryland.³ We invite the committee to refer to this resource as it continues the important work of turning the attendance tide for Maryland's students.

For these reasons, CRSD urges a support with amendments report on House Bill 615.

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³ The Morgan State University. "Winning Strategies on the War against Habitual Student Truancy," (Dec. 2017). Last viewed on Feb 10, 2025.
https://lipa.access.preservica.com/uncategorized/IO_08fb244f-813b-4748-8759-facfd3c2ddd1/

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