



TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

HB 523 County Boards of Education – Root Causes of Chronic Absenteeism and Expulsion – Investigation and Reporting

Position: Favorable with Amendments

By: Linda T. Kohn, President

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The League of Women Voters of Maryland (LWVMD) is a nonpartisan organization that supports policies that provide an equitable, quality education for all children. LWVMD supports with amendments HB 523, *County Boards of Education – Root Causes of Chronic Absenteeism and Expulsion – Investigation and Reporting*, which will require County Boards of Education to investigate and identify root causes of chronic absenteeism and expulsion in the county.

While Maryland gathers information on attendance (i.e., average attendance rate at the school or district level)¹ and on habitual truants (i.e., a student who was absent for 20% or more days)² it does not look closely at student-level attendance metrics such as the number of days each student misses or if a student is chronically absent. Also missing is data on why students miss school days and how absenteeism affects student performance. These limitations reduce educators' ability to design interventions that might reduce absenteeism or improve students' performance.

Chronic absenteeism negatively impacts students in numerous ways. Research finds that:

- Chronic absenteeism is linked to lower academic performance, including graduation and the risk of dropping out of school;
- Chronic absenteeism varies substantially based on gender, race/ethnicity and language status, free or reduced price lunch eligibility (a proxy for poverty status), and by disability status;

¹ Maryland State Department of Education (January 2025). *Summary of attendance: Maryland public schools 2023-2024*. Retrieved from:

<https://www.marylandpublicschools.org/about/Documents/DCAA/SSP/20232024Student/2024-Attendance-Summary-Student-Publication-A.pdf>

² Maryland State Department of Education (December 2024). *Habitual truants: Maryland Public schools 2023-2024*. Retrieved from

<https://www.marylandpublicschools.org/about/Documents/DCAA/SSP/20232024Student/2024-Habitual-Truants-Publication-A.pdf>

- Chronic absenteeism varies by grade level.³

Gathering a broader understanding of the importance of school behaviors and school climate as drivers of academic performances has increased attention on indicators that go beyond traditional performance metrics. That's what this bill will do. To strengthen HB 512, LWVMD supports the following amendments:

- The report includes data on gender, race/ethnicity and language status, free or reduced priced lunch eligibility (a proxy for poverty status), and disability status (IEPS and 504 Plans).
- The report includes disaggregated data by grade level.
- The report includes other factors including suspension/expulsions and retention.

LWVMD supports HB 523 with amendments.

³ Garcia, E. & Weiss, E. (2028). *Student absenteeism: Who misses school and how missing school matters for performance*. Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute. Retrieved from: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED593361.pdf>