



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

Committee: Ways and Means

Date: 2/10/25

Position: FAV

The Maryland Coalition of Families: Maryland Coalition of Families (MCF) is a statewide nonprofit organization that provides family peer support services at no cost to families who have a loved one with mental health, substance use, or problem gambling disorder. Using their personal experience as parents, caregivers, and other loved ones, our staff provide emotional support, resource connection, navigation systems, support groups, and educational training and workshops.

Last year, we served nearly 5,000 families, of which 73% were families with children. We are asking for a favorable report for HB 523 for the reasons listed below.

- A family in Alleghany County, Western Maryland, received very unjust consequences because of their child's chronic absenteeism. This child has behavioral health challenges, which include aggressiveness towards parents and siblings and destruction of property. These parents were charged with *failure to send a child to school*. The father was held in Alleghany County Detention Center for forty-eight hours over the span of a weekend, and the mother was held in Alleghany County Detention Center for forty-eight hours for the same account the following weekend. The sentence was allowed to be alternated on separate weekends to ensure a parent remained in the home with the



the child who was truant and her two siblings, who both have diagnoses of autism. The father, who also has a diagnosis of autism, is now in treatment for PTSD following this event. Currently, the child is now seeing a new therapist and is being homeschooled by her parents. If the child were to become truant again, the parents would face the exact charges and possibly a longer sentence in the Alleghany County Detention Center. These parents did not choose for their child to be absent. The child was also under the care of a therapist at the time. When a child is experiencing mental health and behavioral health challenges, sometimes it is not physically possible for the caregiver to force the child to attend school.

- Exploring and understanding the root cause of chronic absenteeism and expulsion can enhance support for students and their families, potentially improving their academic performance and overall well-being. This understanding can also decrease the number of court cases and time served by caregivers regarding their child's truancy, ultimately reducing the unnecessary trauma these families endure. It can also reduce risk factors that lead to substance use and educational disengagement among vulnerable students.

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