

To the Honorable Members of the Maryland General Assembly:

On behalf of the Positive Schools Center at the University of Maryland School of Social Work, I am writing to express our support for HB197/SB68, with the amendments and recommendations proposed by the members of the Maryland Coalition to Reform School Discipline, which outlines the development and implementation of a comprehensive plan for establishing Restorative Practices in Schools across Maryland.

As a leader in advancing restorative practices in K-12 schools, the Positive Schools Center has witnessed firsthand the transformative impact of restorative approaches on school culture, climate, student behavior, and overall community well-being. HB197/SB68 represents a significant step forward in ensuring that Maryland's public schools are equipped with the tools and frameworks necessary to foster inclusive, relationship-driven, and culturally responsive educational environments. We are dedicated to partnering with school leaders, staff, and districts to create positive, restorative, and supportive school climates that prioritize racial justice, equity, and community voice. Central to our approach is healing-centered engagement, which acknowledges the impact of trauma and adversity on students and educators while fostering supportive, relationship-driven environments where all members of the school community feel seen, heard, and valued.

Why Restorative Practices Matter

Restorative practices prioritize relationship-building and accountability, creating a foundation for positive interactions and mutual respect among students, staff, and families. These practices have been proven to:

1. Reduce suspensions, expulsions, and other exclusionary discipline measures that disproportionately affect students of color and those with disabilities.
2. Address root causes conflict and harm, enabling students to repair relationships and reintegrate successfully into the school community.
3. Improve school climate, resulting in safer, more engaging learning environments for all students.
4. Decrease teacher turnover by fostering a more supportive and collaborative workplace culture.
5. Cultivate learning spaces that promote student-wellbeing, accountability, resilience, connection, hope and collective healing.

Key Benefits of HB197/SB68

HB197/SB68 provides a critical framework for scaling the impact of restorative practices across Maryland. By requiring the development of a comprehensive plan, this legislation ensures that all schools have access to the tools, training, and resources needed to implement these practices effectively which include:

- Establishing a clear framework for integrating restorative practices into daily school operations.
- Requiring evidence-based training for school personnel, including restorative practice coaches, to ensure fidelity and sustainability.

- Setting standards for schoolwide implementation, ensuring equity and consistency across the state.
- Using data-driven performance metrics to monitor and evaluate the outcomes of restorative practices, providing accountability and transparency.
- Implementing whole-school approaches to restorative practices to improve not only disciplinary outcomes but also mental health indicators, attendance, and academic performance.

Our Commitment

We stand ready to collaborate with the Maryland State Department of Education and local school systems to ensure the successful implementation of the comprehensive plan envisioned by HB197/SB68. Together, we can create Restorative Practices Schools that serve as national models of equity, inclusion, and student wholeness.

Thank you for considering this important legislation. We urge a favorable report on House Bill 68 and look forward to the positive impact it will have on Maryland's schools and communities.