



**Testimony in SUPPORT of
House Bill 879: Task Force to Improve Attendance in Absenteeism in Schools**

Ways and Means Committee

Position: Support

February 25, 2025

At Strong Schools Maryland, we work to support the faithful implementation and full funding of the promises legislated through the landmark Blueprint for Maryland's Future. The Blueprint envisions a public school system that is built upon the foundation of equity, supports all students' success, and removes barriers to opportunities. As such, **Strong Schools Maryland urges a favorable report on House Bill 879**, which directly aligns with this vision by establishing a Task Force to Improve School Attendance and Reduce Chronic Absenteeism in Schools.

Chronic absenteeism identifies the number of students who are absent 10% or more of the school days they are enrolled at that school, including both excused and unexcused absences.¹ To effectively address chronic absenteeism, it is critical to understand the root causes. According to Attendance Works, absences generally stem from four broad categories: systemic or personal barriers to attendance, aversion to returning to school, disengagement, and misconceptions or miscommunications regarding attendance or student needs.

These root causes can manifest in various ways including transportation insecurity, biased disciplinary suspension practices, unwelcoming school climate, lack of academic or behavioral supports, undiagnosed disability or unmet accommodations, and more. The many factors influencing a child's ability to attend school often lie beyond the student's control and are the result of systemic barriers to meeting basic needs or creating a safe school environment.² This disproportionately impacts at-risk students who have been historically and systemically marginalized, including Black and Brown students, students with disabilities, and students of low socioeconomic status.

Why is chronic absenteeism harmful? We know that attendance is critical to student achievement, engagement, and fulfillment in schools. Research shows that attendance is positively related to academic achievement and is one of the earliest indicators of student engagement and belonging in the school community.³ While attendance is a powerful predictor of student success, rates of chronic absenteeism are rising at both the National⁴ and State level, with disproportionalities in the rates of chronic absenteeism for disaggregated student groups.⁵

¹ [Maryland Report Card, Definitions](#)

² [Chronic Absence, Root Causes](#)

³ [Achievement and Absenteeism](#)

⁴ [Why is School Attendance Important? The Effects of Chronic Absenteeism](#)

⁵ [Chronic Absenteeism Trends and Bright Spots](#)

Many factors can contribute to a student's ability to attend school, and, as a result, it is critical to collect data on chronic absenteeism and investigate how to support Maryland students in attending school.

House bill 879 aligns with the goals of the Blueprint by investigating how to break down systemic barriers and implement strategies to empower students to come to school as it seeks to establish a task force to:

- Collect and analyze data including best practices, state wide trends, and local trends;
- Study and identify the factors that contribute to chronic absenteeism;
- Develop guidance and a toolkit for schools in order to improve attendance rates; and
- And promote culturally responsive and non-punitive approaches to chronic absenteeism.

The Blueprint promises to transform Maryland public schools. However, achieving this transformation requires proactive steps to address chronic absenteeism to ensure students are present and engaged in school. By supporting this legislation, we can make significant progress in breaking down barriers to school attendance and creating a more equitable and supportive educational environment for all Maryland students.

For these reasons, we urge the committee to issue a Favorable Report on House Bill 879.

Please contact Kenzie Funk at kenzie@strongschoolsmaryland.org for additional questions.