

Testimony in Opposition of HB 137

Public Schools - Children Charged With a Crime of Violence - Prohibition on In-Person Attendance (School Safety Act of 2025)

TO: Chairperson Vanessa E. Atterberry, Vice-Chairperson Jheanelle K. Wilkins, and Members of the House Ways and Means Committee

FROM: Magdalena Tsiongas

DATE: January 23, 2025

I am writing to oppose HB137 which seeks to prohibit students from attending public school in person if they have been charged with a crime of violence. This bill is unnecessary, harmful to students, and raises significant concerns about equity, due process, and compliance with federal law.

Having worked in public schools in Baltimore for years, I know the importance of investment in our children through education, recreational programs and workforce development. I also know the importance of treating children like children, even when they make mistakes.

Research consistently shows that education is the number one protective factor against recidivism. By removing students from in-person schooling, HB 137 isolates them from critical academic, social, and emotional supports. Having led the attendance team work in a public school to ensure improved student attendance, I know the barriers already facing many students to daily school attendance. Further barriers only serve to limit a student's potential opportunities in the future. To remove a child from school removes them from the stability and support of that environment. Virtual learning and home-based instruction are inadequate substitutes for the comprehensive educational experience provided in traditional school settings, particularly for students with learning disabilities or other deficits.

For these reasons, I oppose HB137 and urge an unfavorable report.