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January 21, 2025

Delegate Vanessa E. Atterbeary, Chair
Delegate Jheanelle K. Wilkins, Vice Chair
House Ways and Means Committee
130 Taylor House Office Building
131 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and Members of the Committee:

RE: HB0137 - Public Schools - Children Charged With a Crime of Violence - Prohibition on In-Person Attendance (School Safety Act of 2025)

Position: OPPOSE

The Maryland Psychological Association, (MPA), which represents over 1,000 doctoral-level psychologists throughout the state, asks the House Ways and Means Committee to report UNFAVORABLY on HB0137.

We understand and strongly support the desire and intent behind this bill, which is to provide a safe environment in school for teachers, students, and staff. We are concerned that the bill seems overly punitive in that it does not address how these kids might be integrated, if appropriate, back into regular school environments. We know that schools have mechanisms in place to address both the safety of the larger student population while addressing the educational, social, emotional and psychological needs of children who have acted out in a violent manner. Additionally, schools have demonstrated the ability to safely reintegrate this group of kids, on a case-by-case basis, back into the regular school environment when appropriate.

Segregating violent juvenile offenders with no opportunity to return to school nor be exposed to a broader peer group is a short-term solution that can lead to: kids dropping out of school, kids forming or seeking membership in gangs, and ultimately could feed the school-to-prison pipeline. It seems that this bill is focused on a short-term solution that is likely to adversely affect not only the child offenders but potentially creates larger problems for the community.

Thank you for considering our comments on HB0137. If we can be of any further assistance as the Judiciary Committee considers this bill, please do not hesitate to contact MPA's Legislative Chair, Dr. Stephanie Wolf at mpalegislativcommittee@gmail.com.

Respectfully submitted,

David Goode-Cross, Ph.D.
David Goode-Cross, Ph.D.
President

Stephanie Wolf, JD, Ph.D.
Stephanie Wolf, JD, Ph.D.
Chair, MPA Legislative Committee

cc: Richard Bloch, Esq., Counsel for Maryland Psychological Association
Barbara Brocato & Dan Shattuck, MPA Government Affairs