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# MARYLAND COALITION TO REFORM SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

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**Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment**  
**HB 197: Public Schools- Restorative Practices Schools- Establishment**  
**DATE: January 29, 2025**

**POSITION: Favorable with Amendments**

The Maryland Coalition to Reform School Discipline (CRSD) brings together advocates, service providers, and community members dedicated to transforming school discipline practices within Maryland’s public school systems. CRSD is committed to the fair and equitable treatment of ALL students regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, religion, and socio-economic status, and reducing barriers to learning for ALL students. CRSD has been a vocal advocate of Restorative Practices and decreasing our state’s dependence on punitive discipline for the last 10 years. **CRSD strongly supports HB 197’s goal of helping schools become more Restorative Places, but requests revisions to HB 197 to focus on Restorative Practice’s true proactive and whole-school focus.**

**Restorative Practices, when implemented with fidelity, are an effective way to build a positive school culture that is healthy, safe, and inclusive. Restorative Practices is more than just a responsive discipline strategy.** The 2019 Governor’s Commission recommended the state “support all schools in adopting restorative approaches for creating and sustaining positive learning communities”<sup>1</sup>. Restorative Practices are evidence-based school-wide strategies, and the mindset of adult educators and staff are essential. To create a restorative school culture, best practice is to first work with teachers and staff to create a restorative culture and practice among adults working in the school.<sup>2</sup> Restorative Practices should ideally spend eighty percent of their efforts on proactive relationship building which makes it possible to resolve conflict and make schools safer, healthier places. CRSD recommends that Maryland law and COMAR should reflect that Restorative Practices are proactive, school-wide, and adult-focused strategies, rather than focusing on addressing student discipline. **Restorative Practices make schools more safe for everyone.**

**CRSD supports HB 197’s request for Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to develop a plan to support a faithful implementation of Restorative Practice as a school culture and climate effort.** We support the creation of a shared definition, consistent reporting standards, the creation of a plan to increase the use of Restorative Practices throughout the state and develop a restorative culture among adults at all levels of the school system. Data should also be collected across a broader spectrum of school outcomes, including staff retention, parent involvement, and all stakeholder’s positive feelings of safety about their school community. This plan should also include guidance for districts to revise discipline and human capital policies to move beyond responsive disciplinary actions.

**CRSD recommends that MSDE assemble a group of Restorative Practices Practitioners from throughout the state who have experience implementing Restorative Practices in a culturally responsiveness and racially equitable lens to assist in the creation of the plan.** Restorative Practices should be life-affirming and responsive to the needs of ALL members of the school community,

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<sup>1</sup> <https://msa.maryland.gov/megafile/msa/speccol/sc5300/sc5339/000113/023600/023694/20190078e.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://rjpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/Implementation-Guide-FINAL.pdf>

especially Black students, Latina students, multilingual learners, other students of color, and students who identify as LGBTQ+. It should also include the expectations and work environment for school staff. The training for Restorative Practices must help teachers and school staff become aware of their own biases and what strategies to use to mitigate them. Many studies have shown that racial bias is prevalent among teachers and school staff.<sup>3</sup> One study reported that of the tens of thousands of teachers and school staff surveyed, 30% of respondents expressed explicit pro-white/anti-Black bias, and 77% expressed implicit pro-white/anti-Black bias. Studies have shown that implicit racial and ethnic biases are associated with lower expectations of students, unfair discipline practices, lower quality instruction, and less attention to fostering positive social environments<sup>4</sup>. Further, beyond resolving disputes among students, Restorative Practices must also be about creating a social environment where students have the opportunity to learn about each other's lived experiences and culture, and how to empathize and develop positive relationships with each other. And the practice must be about helping Black and Brown children, and those in the LGBTQ+ community, to critically think about their place in the world and help them develop strong identities and self-worth to ameliorate the negative societal messages that they often internalize. If school staff is not trained in culturally responsive practice, students' behavior can be misinterpreted and underlying personal, interpersonal, and institutional causes can go unaddressed.

**CRSD supports the expansion of Restorative Practices in Maryland Schools, and requests that HB 197 be amended to implement Restorative Practices proactively and school-wide with fidelity and in alignment with best practices.** CRSD is invested in partnering with lawmakers to pass HB 197 in a form that helps the state expand the use of Restorative Practices community-wide, rather than just a response when conflict or undesirable student behaviors occur.

For more information contact:  
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<sup>3</sup> Starck, Jordan, et al. Teachers are people too: May 2020. Examining the Racial Bias of Teachers Compared to Other American Adults. Educational Researcher.  
[https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.3102/0013189X20912758?casa\\_token=Y2RAU9sDmvgAAAAA:ncmagk0D8VVVLBg5x9hJ6WfVI\\_Qgk9nrWqxUUMFwFp4myKTmlU4mQ1YGGz3t-GgDNYLTjwAJsxkKpQ](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.3102/0013189X20912758?casa_token=Y2RAU9sDmvgAAAAA:ncmagk0D8VVVLBg5x9hJ6WfVI_Qgk9nrWqxUUMFwFp4myKTmlU4mQ1YGGz3t-GgDNYLTjwAJsxkKpQ)

<sup>4</sup> Teachers are people too: Racial bias among American educators. July 2020. The Brookings Institution.  
<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/teachers-are-people-too-racial-bias-among-american-educators/#:~:text=Our%20most%20precise%20raw%20estimates,white%2Fanti%2DBlack%20bias.>