



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

January 27, 2025

House Bill 197: Public Schools – Restorative Practices Schools – Comprehensive Plan

### **Letter of Support**

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

I am writing on behalf of the Maryland School Psychologists' Association (MSPA), a professional organization representing about 500 school psychologists in Maryland. We advocate for the social-emotional, behavioral, and academic wellbeing of students and families across the state.

House Bill 197 requires Maryland schools to develop a comprehensive plan to implement requirements for the establishment of restorative practices schools. Restorative practices emphasize building relationships, finding ways to connect with the community, and proactively improve school climate and culture. Restorative practices can reduce exclusionary discipline practices that disproportionately impact historically disadvantaged students, such as students with disabilities, BIPOC students, and students from lower SES backgrounds (Losen, Martinez, and Gillespie, 2012)<sup>1</sup>. Restorative practices are used across the country to counteract the “school-to-prison pipeline.” Through restorative practices, when engaging in a negative behavior, students are asked to reflect and learn from their behavior, identify the harm they caused others, and repair and rebuild any relationships that were harmed. It is built on the foundation that students need to feel connected to each other and the adults in the school, and when behavior occurs, it is a learning opportunity for the school community. Exclusionary discipline practices do not improve student behavior, and they can damage a student’s connection with the school building (Flannery, 2015)<sup>2</sup>.

Darling-Hammond (2023) used data from 485 middle schools over six years to find that exposure to restorative practices improves students’ academic achievement and reduces suspension rates and disparities. Students of all racial and ethnic backgrounds benefited from the program, with BIPOC students benefiting the most. We know that all Maryland students deserve to learn in an environment where they feel safe and connected, where they can learn. Restorative practices written into school plans and implemented with fidelity will help Maryland schools achieve this ideal for all students.

MSPA supports House Bill 197, including the development of a comprehensive plan to implement restorative practices in Maryland public schools. If we can provide any additional information or be of any assistance, please contact us at [legislative@mspaonline.org](mailto:legislative@mspaonline.org) or Sarah Peters at [speters@hbsstrategies.us](mailto:speters@hbsstrategies.us) or 410-322-2320.

Respectfully submitted,

Chair, Legislative Committee  
Maryland School Psychologists’ Association

<sup>1</sup> Losen, Daniel J., Tia Martinez, and Jon Gillespie, *Suspended Education in California*, Los Angeles, Calif.: The Center for Civil Rights Remedies at the UCLA Civil Rights Center, April 10, 2013. Accessed January 24, 2025.