

HOUSE WAYS and MEANS
HOUSE BILL 197: Public Schools- Restorative Practices Schools- Establishment
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Written Testimony by Julius Scott, MSW student Salisbury University, personnel coordinator The Choice Program at UMBC, and Restorative Practices certified practitioner.

I fully support HB197, which would implement the requirements to create Restorative Practices in public schools in Maryland. Time after time I have witnessed the passing of laws that create a detrimental backslide in the fight for child welfare in this state. Humans are hardwired to act on emotion when faced with a difficult situation, especially at ages when our brains are not fully developed. Yet, the state holds our children to a standard where they need to be perfect, and if they make a mistake as a result of their lack of emotional regulation they are penalized and labeled as delinquents. A label that will follow them in every aspect of their young lives.

Restorative practices have been proven to be an effective solution to this lack of emotional regulation and many other challenges that students face daily. I have worked with youth in multiple settings, including a juvenile detention center run by the Department of Juvenile Services, an elementary/middle school in the middle of West Baltimore, and as a mentor to young people under the care and supervision of the Department of Juvenile Services in communities all around Baltimore City. In 2024, I became a certified practitioner of restorative practices by the International Institute of Restorative Practices. During my work, I have noticed that when discussing the topics of behavior, academic performance, and attendance, conflict arises as a common theme. I have seen conflict arise in a multitude of ways. Everything from a familial/community dispute to someone posting the wrong thing on Instagram. No matter the origin of the conflict, it could have been solved peacefully if staff were trained in restorative practices. Sadly, in many situations, they are not and it creates an unsafe environment for all parties involved. An environment that is not conducive to efficient academic performance. Schools may use restorative practices as a tool for relationship and community-building before negative emotions run high.

When students do not feel safe, they will not be successful. All around Maryland, schools are the focal point of youth conflict that in many instances unfortunately leads to life-altering consequences. Restorative practices can and will be the solution to this issue. It allows students to build community and repair relationships within their peer group. Disciplinary issues and conflict will be combated by non-punitive responses that get to the root of the harm, support

accountability for offenders, and promote healing for victims. Also, when a student re-enters the school community after suspension, truancy, or incarceration a plan is developed that aims to foster wrap-around support and academic achievement. Ultimately, restorative practices are a preventative and proactive approach that should be implemented across the state of Maryland, so I must once again emphasize the importance of voting for HB197.