

DENI TAVERAS
Legislative District 47B
Prince George's County

Health and Government
Operations Committee

Subcommittees

Government Operations
and Health Facilities

Insurance and Pharmaceuticals



The Maryland House of Delegates
6 Bladen Street, Room 206
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3101 • 301-858-3101
800-492-7122 Ext. 3101
Deni.Taveras@house.state.md.us

THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**Root Causes of Chronic Absenteeism and Expulsion– Investigation and Reporting HB523
Testimony of Maryland State Delegate Deni Taveras**

Thank you, Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and committee members. I am here to ask for your favorable report on HB 523 – Root Causes of Chronic Absenteeism and Expulsion – Investigation and Reporting.

This bill addresses the critical issue of chronic absenteeism and expellable offenses in Maryland schools by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to identify reasons for what constitutes excused and unexcused absences. There are 11 recognized lawful reasons for student absences. We also have a nonuniform list of excused absences across the state, such as, college visits, vacations, military deployment, civic engagement, religious education, impoverished conditions, and illness in the family. However, per Attendance Works, a 501c3 organization that specializes in school attendance, found that the statewide average of unexcused absences is 65% with several counties reporting in the 70th and 90th percentile. This is simply not acceptable, given that by not addressing the poor effects of negative root causes unexcused absences leads children to have greater encounters with drugs, the law, and other challenging life outcomes.

We must start from a leveled playing field to see why 35% of our children are chronically absent, criminalizing parents, disproportionately impacting low-income and minority communities. This absenteeism is linked to lower academic performance, higher dropout rates, and long-term economic hardship. This is why establishing the same criteria for unexcused absences helps us develop targeted programming to improve educational outcomes. Attendance Works recommends the following criteria as umbrellas for unexcused absences: academic condition, safety concerns, social dynamics, factors to be studied include physical and mental health issues, addiction, Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) considerations, bullying, family vacations, and domestic situation, health status, school culture, student voice, parent voice, and attendance barriers for students with identified disabilities. The findings from this effort will inform data-driven policies and interventions to improve student outcomes and foster a more equitable education system.

This legislation provides an opportunity to move from reactive to proactive solutions. By identifying the underlying causes of truancy, schools can implement targeted interventions, rather than just truancy court which engages children with the justice system. In closing, I ask this esteemed committee for your favorable report on HB 523.