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BILL: HB 1313

TITLE: Education - Student Behavior - Parent and Guardian Notice and Required Counseling (Parent and Guardian Accountability Act)

DATE: March 5, 2025

POSITION: Unfavorable

COMMITTEE: House Ways & Means Committee

CONTACT: Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director, PSSAM

The Public School Superintendents' Association of Maryland (PSSAM), on behalf of all twenty-four local school superintendents, **opposes** House Bill 1313.

This bill establishes that it is unlawful for a parent or guardian of a student in a public school to fail to seek and participate in counseling with the parent's or guardian's child after receiving a certain notice of violent and disruptive behavior. A parent or guardian convicted under this section may be ordered by the court to perform community service as determined by the court. The bill also requires a public school principal to provide a written notice to the parent or guardian of a student who engages in a certain number of violent and disruptive behaviors or school-related activities during the school year.

Local superintendents strongly support high levels of parental engagement in students' education, and in response, prioritize the establishment of policies and procedures concerning student discipline. However, it is very unlikely that the approach proposed in this legislation will produce positive outcomes or increased parental engagement.

State law reflects the Legislature's long-standing recognition that principals and superintendents have broad discretion to make student discipline decisions "as warranted" (Section 7-305 of the Education Article). State regulations mirror this deference to local decision-making, as well as place a clear emphasis on maintaining a safe learning environment for all students. Local school systems take very seriously the need for strict and comprehensive student discipline and school

safety policies that focus on controlling and/or preventing bullying, verbal threats, student fights, and numerous other actions that can disrupt effective classroom environments.

In line with State regulations and local decision-making, PSSAM strongly supports the implementation of restorative approaches to discipline -- approaches that were mandated by the Legislature in 2019 for all Maryland public school systems; these concepts are not reflected in this legislation. The law defines “restorative approaches” as a relationship-focused student discipline model that (1) Is preventative and proactive; (2) Emphasizes building strong relationships and setting clear behavioral expectations that contribute to the school community well-being; (3) In response to behavior that violates clear behavioral expectations, focuses on accountability for any harm done by the problem behavior; and, (4) Addresses ways to repair the relationships affected by the problem behavior with the voluntary participation of an individual who was harmed.

While this legislation aims to provide an accountability measure for student discipline, it fails to meet other outlined objectives that are essential parts of a restorative approach. Proactive practices that are implemented following appropriate professional development and training of all teachers, board members, superintendents, students, parents, and the larger community can make significant improvements in school climate and learning conditions. In conjunction with local discretion, proactive and restorative student discipline approaches allow positive parental and student engagement in the discipline process without the threat of criminal penalties.

For these reasons, PSSAM **opposes** House Bill 1313 and kindly requests an **unfavorable** report.