



House Ways and Means Committee

January 23, 2025

House Bill 68 – *Public Schools – Children Suspected of a Crime of Violence – Prohibition on In-Person Attendance (Student Protection Act of 2025)*

House Bill 137 – *Public Schools – Children Charged With a Crime of Violence – Prohibition on In-Person Attendance (School Safety Act of 2025)*

POSTION: OPPOSE

The Maryland Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (MDAAP) is a statewide association representing more than 1,100 pediatricians and allied pediatric and adolescent healthcare practitioners in the State and is a strong and established advocate promoting the health and safety of all the children we serve. On behalf of MDAAP, I submit this letter of opposition for House Bill 68 and House Bill 137 .

I am a pediatrician who treats adolescents, and I serve as Chairperson of the Committee on Adolescent Health of the Maryland Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. All of us want safe schools for children and staff. Procedures are in place in which school officials, in consultation with law enforcement, make individualized assessments regarding the safety of the student population and for the students accused of violent and other serious offenses. These consultations may result in a decision in which it is not safe for a particular student to return to school. No system is perfect, and a decision may be made to return such a student to school when, in fact, the student is NOT safe to return to school. We must continue to strive to make these safety/return to school decisions as accurate and appropriate as possible.

However, these bills, which propose blanket prohibitions on in-person school attendance for students charged with, or under investigation for violent crimes, go too far in the other direction. Whatever one's opinion about the wisdom of school closures during a pandemic, we've just come through a period of time in which many students were forced to stay home. In my experience, as a Pediatrician who treats adolescents, there are significant social, psychological, educational and economic effects of forcing a teen to miss school and stay home.

Economic realities for many families will result in many of these students being home alone through the length of the school day. These teenagers are psychologically at risk, and being home alone with no adult supervision is NOT where they should be. Many of these troubled adolescents already have learning problems and other educational difficulties. Placing them in a "virtual" learning environment, often without reliable wi-fi or internet access, will further exacerbate their educational problems. The data reveals that, in the 2022-2023 school year, approximately 50% of

students removed from school after a reportable offense failed that school year. For those parents who are at home with their child, I have seen the economic burden on families faced with the necessity of leaving work to supervise an at-home school child.

I have witnessed, many times in my career, the positive effects of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. These two bills violate key mandates of the IDEA and 504 Act. Finally, I have seen many factors that disproportionately affect African American students. House Bills 68 and 137, forcing automatic school removal, will deepen racial disparities.

Our schools and communities must be safe, and our teenagers must be guided to reach their full potential. House Bills 137 and 68 accomplish neither of these tasks, and present serious problems for our students and their families. I urge you to oppose these two bills.

Thank you for your attention to this letter.

For more information call:

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