



LEGISLATIVE BLACK CAUCUS OF MARYLAND, INC.

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February 25, 2025

Chair Vanessa E. Atterbeary
Ways and Means Committee
130 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

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

The Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland offers its strong and favorable support for House Bill 879 (HB 879) - Task Force to Improve Attendance and Reduce Chronic Absenteeism in Schools. This bill establishes a Task Force to identify, prevent, and eliminate chronic absenteeism in Maryland schools, ensuring that all students, particularly Black students who face systemic barriers to consistent attendance, receive the support necessary to succeed academically. **HB 879 is a 2025 legislative priority for the Black Caucus.**

The Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland strongly believes that our education system must prioritize equity, accessibility, and student success. Chronic absenteeism disproportionately affects Black students in Maryland, limiting their academic outcomes and long-term opportunities. According to a 2023 report from the Maryland State Department of Education, Black students in Maryland experience absenteeism rates nearly 1.5 times higher than their white peers due to factors such as economic hardship, transportation barriers, school discipline disparities, and limited access to mental health resources. Nationally, the U.S. Department of Education reported that 30% of Black students in K-12 schools were chronically absent during the 2021-2022 school year, significantly impacting graduation rates and future opportunities.

HB 879 addresses these inequities by prioritizing non-punitive, culturally responsive strategies to combat absenteeism. The bill ensures that solutions are data-driven and community-focused, centering on the needs of Black students who are disproportionately impacted by exclusionary discipline policies, economic instability, and systemic disinvestment in education. By establishing a Task Force that includes educators, parents, policymakers, and experts in attendance tracking, HB 879 promotes proactive interventions rather than punitive measures like suspensions, which disproportionately harm Black students.

Additionally, the bill mandates the development of a statewide toolkit for preventing absenteeism, ensuring that schools have the resources to support Black students in overcoming attendance barriers. By setting a statewide goal for absenteeism reduction and improving data collection methods, HB 879 ensures that Maryland can address disparities in education access and attainment more

effectively. The bill's emphasis on community involvement, parental engagement, and school-based interventions directly supports Black students and families who are often marginalized in traditional attendance policies.

For Black communities in Maryland, the impact of this bill cannot be overstated. By implementing equitable attendance policies and providing targeted support for students facing systemic barriers, HB 879 ensures that Black children have a fair opportunity to succeed academically. Chronic absenteeism is a leading predictor of low graduation rates and future economic instability, and this legislation provides the tools to disrupt this cycle and create a more just and inclusive educational system for all students.

The Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland strongly supports HB 879 and its efforts to reduce absenteeism through equitable, community-centered policies. This bill reflects our commitment to an education system that prioritizes fairness, accountability, and student success while addressing the systemic disparities that continue to affect Black Marylanders. We urge your support for HB 879, as it offers a comprehensive and proactive approach to ensuring that all students, regardless of background, have the opportunity to thrive.

For these reasons, the Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland strongly supports House Bill 879.

Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland