

**TO:** Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee  
**FROM:** Theresa Smith, Special Education Advocate  
**DATE:** March 30, 2026  
**BILL NO:** HB0014 (County Boards of Education – Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation – Information Collection and Reporting Requirements)



**POSITION:** Support with Amendments

**Statement of Intent:** I am providing informational testimony on HB0014 as a special education advocate. My intent is to ensure that legislative reporting requirements translate into tangible protections for all students. I seek to bridge the gap between data collection and meaningful intervention, particularly for students with disabilities who are often disproportionately impacted by behavioral policies. The system must move beyond just counting incidents to actively solving the root causes of bullying through qualified oversight and mandated action plans.

This bill seeks to alter the contents of bullying, harassment, or intimidation forms and requires county boards of education to report and post specific information regarding these incidents. While I support the increased transparency this bill provides, data collection is only as valuable as the actions it triggers. To ensure this legislation protects all children, I urge the committee to consider the following amendments.

## 1. Proposed Amendment: Action for Change Mandated Interventions

HB0014 requires county boards to report when there is a **substantial increase** or **disproportionate incident rate** of bullying for students in specific groups.

- **The Amendment:** Any report indicating a disproportionate rate or substantial increase in bullying must be accompanied by a **targeted intervention plan**.
- **The Goal:** Reporting must be a catalyst for systemic improvement—such as mandated school-wide culture shifts, specialized staff training, or community-based support programs—rather than a mere ledger of harm.

## 2. Proposed Amendment: Manifestation Determination & Qualified Oversight

The bill defines "bullying, harassment, or intimidation" as **intentional conduct**. For many students with disabilities, behavior is often a manifestation of their disability rather than a calculated "intent" to harm.

- **Manifestation Data Point:** For cases where the alleged perpetrator is a student with a disability, the reporting form must include a data point indicating whether the act was determined to be a **manifestation of their disability**.
- **Qualified Individual Requirement:** This determination must be confirmed by a **qualified professional** (such as a school psychologist along with a member of the student's Individualized Education Program/504 Plan team).
- **The Goal:** This ensures that we are not mischaracterizing disability-related behaviors while accurately identifying where additional behavioral supports are required.

By ensuring that new reporting requirements lead directly to action and by providing expert oversight for cases involving students with disabilities, we can transform HB0014 into a tool for true equity. I urge the committee to adopt these amendments to better serve all of Maryland's children.

Thank you,  
Theresa Smith