
MARYLAND COALITION TO REFORM SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

SENATE JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS COMMITTEE

SENATE BILL 715: Washington County - Juveniles - Truancy Reduction Pilot Program

DATE: February 25, 2026

POSITION: UNFAVORABLE

The Maryland Coalition to Reform School Discipline (CRSD) brings together advocates, service providers, and community members dedicated to transforming school discipline practices within Maryland's public school systems. CRSD is committed to the fair and equitable treatment of all students, reducing barriers to learning, and keeping all students on track to graduate, including pregnant or parenting students, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, religion, and socio-economic status. **CRSD opposes SB 715** which would permit the creation of a formal judicial truancy court program in the juvenile court in Washington County.

CRSD has consistently opposed the expansion of formal truancy court programs throughout Maryland without first evaluating the effectiveness of these programs. The pilot truancy court programs were reviewed in both 2008 and 2011, and those studies recommended more data prior to expansion.¹ Sound policy requires the collection and analysis of data before there is any additional expansion of court involvement. In 2025, the legislature passed HB 1442 which requires a report by November regarding information on the outcomes of the truancy court programs and recommendations to improve the function of current programs. In addition, in July 2025, the General Assembly also authorized the creation of the Task Force

¹ See Administrative Office of the Courts, *Assessing School Attendance Problems and Truancy Intervention in Maryland: A Synthesis of Evidence from Baltimore County and the Lower Eastern Shore*, at 99 (2011), https://www.igsr.umd.edu/applied_research/Pubs/Truancy%20Intervention%20Synthesis%20Report.pdf; Md. Dept. of Leg. Services, Office of Policy Analysis, *Approaches to Solving the Problem of Truancy* (2008), <https://dls.maryland.gov/pubs/prod/CourtCrimCivil/Truancy-and-CINS.pdf>.

to Improve Attendance and Reduce Chronic Absenteeism in Schools, which will complete its work in December 2026.² We believe that it is reasonable to delay the creation of any new programs until Maryland can evaluate the effectiveness of these programs, particularly given inherent concerns regarding more court involvement.

CRSD has long held that truancy court referrals funnel children into the school-to-prison pipeline. Research has shown that a single court appearance increases the chance that a young person will drop out of school.³ For instance, students in truancy court can face sanctions for non-compliance with court orders. If students do not comply perfectly with court orders, they may be required to go before the truancy court again and get further enmeshed in the court system.

Additionally, funneling students into truancy court ignores that reality that many students who are truant have unmet academic and behavioral needs. Moreover, truancy court programs have no authority to ensure accountability on the part of the school system which may have failed to meet a student's needs. Prior to referring a child to a truancy court, a school system should be required to show that it has exhausted school and community-based resources. For students with a disability who have an individualized education program (IEP) or Section 504 plan, the school team should address attendance concerns through goals, supports, and accommodations related to attendance.

Rather than expanding court involvement, CRSD urges school systems to focus on evidence-based interventions that are non-punitive and center on prevention. These strategies include schoolwide programs that improve school climate and school engagement, as well as student-focused services such as increased academic supports, special education services, transportation, behavior intervention plans, counseling, social work services, and mentoring programs. Maryland's focus and commitment to restorative practices is also a more promising intervention. The [Blueprint for Maryland's Future](#)'s focus on community schools and the services and supports those schools can offer is an additional strategy that addresses the issue of attendance.⁴ Expanding the judiciary's engagement and increasing students' contact with court systems to address this issue is not the answer.

² See Task Force to Improve Attendance & Reduce Chronic Absenteeism in Schools, <https://msa.maryland.gov/msa/mdmanual/26excom/html/01absent.html>.

³ Am. Civ. Liberties Union, *Bullies in Blue: The Origins and Consequences of School Policing* (2017), https://www.aclu.org/sites/default/files/field_document/aclu_bullies_in_blue_4_11_17_final.pdf; Gary Sweeten, *Who Will Graduate? Disruption of High School Education by Arrest and Court Involvement*, 23 Justice Quarterly 4 (2006).

⁴ See Maryland Center for Community Schools, Towson University, *From Absence to Engagement: Community Schools' Innovative Approaches to Reducing Chronic Absenteeism and Increasing Attendance* (Research Brief Spring 2025), <https://www.towson.edu/coe/centers/maryland-center-community-schools/mccs-research-brief-3.pdf>.

For these reasons, **CRSD opposes SB 715.**

For more information contact: Maryland Coalition to Reform School Discipline
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CRSD Members

- ACLU of Maryland
- Disability Rights Maryland
- Maryland Alliance for Racial Equity In Education (MAREE)
- Maryland Office of the Public Defender
- Public Justice Center
- The Choice Program at UMBC
- The Sayra and Neil Meyerhoff Center for Families, Children and the Courts