

SB0715.pdf

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Position: FAV

BRETT R. WILSON
ADMINISTRATIVE JUDGE
CIRCUIT COURT FOR
WASHINGTON COUNTY



WASHINGTON COUNTY
CIRCUIT COURTHOUSE
24 SUMMIT AVENUE
HAGERSTOWN, MD 21740
TELEPHONE (240) 313-2573

February 23, 2026

To the Honored Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee:

Thank you for considering SB0715—Washington County—Juveniles--Truancy Reduction Pilot Program. This bill will allow the Circuit Court of Washington County to develop a program, along with our fellow stakeholders, to reduce truancy amongst the youth of Washington County. Washington County has a significant number of youths who are falling behind and limiting their chance of success in life due to poor school attendance and involvement with Juvenile Services and social service. Our goal is to develop a program with a broad reach to positively affect the lives of as many youths as we are able.

Thank you for your attention to our youth and I urge a favorable report on SB0715.

Sincerely,

Brett R. Wilson
Administrative Judge

SB 715 FAVORABLE WashCoBdofEduc 2-25-26.pdf

Uploaded by: Jamie Brown

Position: FAV



BILL: Senate Bill 715
TITLE: Washington County – Juveniles – Truancy Reduction Pilot Program
HEARING DATE: February 25, 2026
POSITION: FAVORABLE
COMMITTEE: Judicial Proceedings Committee
CONTACT: Ms. Jamie Brown, Paralegal & Legislative Representative, 301-766-2946

Regular school attendance is vital to meeting the educational needs of each student. Schools educate students most effectively and provide the necessary support and assistance to maximize success in school when students have regular school attendance. Senate Bill 715 would allow the circuit administrative judge of Washington County to establish a Truancy Reduction Pilot Program and is fully supported by Washington County Board of Education as another method to combat truancy.

Addressing truancy violations in juvenile court through the truancy docket has a direct impact on the student unlike district court where the impact is on the parent/guardian. Aside from ordering the student to attend school, other dispositions can include an order for the student to attend counseling, including family counseling, to attend substance abuse evaluation and treatment, or to attend mental health evaluation and treatment. It is through such student-directed dispositions that the root cause of the student's truancy may be uncovered and addressed resulting in the student's regular daily attendance.

Daily attendance is essential to better academic performance, greater work opportunities, higher education opportunities, better student outcomes, and supports social/emotional development. Washington County Public Schools believes that every day matters and is essential to student success and welcomes a Truancy Reduction Pilot Program to help combat truancy.

Washington County Board of Education supports Senate Bill 715 and requests the Judicial Proceedings Committee to issue a favorable report.

Thank you.

Cc: Washington County Board of Education Members
Washington County Delegation to the Maryland General Assembly
The Honorable Brett R. Wilson, Washington County Administrative Judge
Dr. David T. Sovine, Superintendent
Dr. Gary Willow, Deputy Superintendent
Mr. Jeffrey Proulx, Chief Operating Officer
Mr. Jeremy Jakoby, Director of Student Services, School Counseling and School Health

SB 715 Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Paul Corderman

Position: FAV

PAUL D. CORDERMAN
Legislative District 2
Frederick and Washington Counties

Budget and Taxation Committee

Subcommittees

Capital Budget

Education, Business and Administration



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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

February 25, 2026

Senate Judicial Proceedings
Chair William C. Smith, Jr.
Vice Chair Jeff Waldstreicher
2 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Testimony In Support of SB 715 - Washington County – Juveniles – Truancy Reduction Pilot Program

Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to present Senate Bill 715. SB 715 authorizes the Circuit Administrative Judge of the Fourth Circuit to establish a Truancy Reduction Pilot Program in the juvenile court in Washington County. The bill makes the addition to the prior law of the Courts and Judicial Proceedings Article to add the Fourth Circuit to the list of circuits permitted to create a truancy reduction pilot program.

Thank you for your consideration of this bill, and we respectfully request a favorable report on SB 715.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "P. D. Corderman".

Senator Paul D. Corderman – District 2, Washington & Frederick Counties

sb715.pdf

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Position: FAV

HON. STACY A. MAYER
CIRCUIT COURT
JUDGE
BALTIMORE COUNTY
CHAIR

HON. RICHARD SANDY
CIRCUIT COURT
JUDGE
FREDERICK COUNTY
VICE-CHAIR



KELLEY O'CONNOR
ASSISTANT STATE COURT
ADMINISTRATOR
GOVERNMENT RELATIONS
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SUZANNE PELZ, ESQ.
SNR. GOVT. RELATIONS AND
PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICER
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MARYLAND JUDICIAL COUNCIL LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE

MEMORANDUM

TO: Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
FROM: Legislative Committee
Suzanne D. Pelz, Esq.
410-260-1523
RE: Senate Bill 715
Washington County – Juveniles – Truancy Reduction Pilot
Program
DATE: February 18, 2026
(2/25)
POSITION: Support

The Maryland Judiciary supports Senate Bill 715. The Judiciary fully supports Truancy Reduction Pilot Programs. These programs focus on children who (1) are required to attend school under Maryland law, and (2) do not regularly attend school, despite the efforts of school officials to engage the child and their parents with school. The goal of the program is to look at root causes of a child's truancy and school disengagement, design and implement services that engage the child and family with the child's education and increase the child's participation and success in their education.

No matter the reason why a child is not attending or avoiding school, not going to school may hamper a child for life. Youth who do not attain a high school education, for example, are more likely to experience poverty and to enter the criminal justice system. The Truancy Reduction Pilot Programs help get children back to school. It identifies why a child is not going to school and provides a child and parents with access to needed services.

The Judiciary supports establishing a Truancy Reduction Pilot Program in Washington County with approval from the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Maryland, helping students stay in school and get needed support.

cc. Washington County Senators
Judicial Council
Legislative Committee
Kelley O'Connor

OPD SB 715 testimony _ unfav.2026.pdf

Uploaded by: Alyssa Fieo

Position: UNF



NATASHA DARTIGUE
PUBLIC DEFENDER

KEITH LOTRIDGE
DEPUTY PUBLIC DEFENDER

MELISSA ROTHSTEIN
CHIEF OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

ELIZABETH HILLIARD
ACTING DIRECTOR OF GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

POSITION ON PROPOSED LEGISLATION

BILL: SB 715 – Juveniles – Truancy Reduction Pilot Program – Expansion

FROM: Maryland Office of the Public Defender

POSITION: Unfavorable

DATE: February 25, 2026

The Maryland Office of the Public Defender (MOPD) opposes Senate Bill 751, which would expand the judiciary’s ability to create a truancy court program in Washington County. In 2011, the Truancy Reduction Pilot Program (TRPP), along with two other truancy reduction models in Maryland, were evaluated. It was explicitly noted that “[i]deally, expansion of these programs or their use as models would be predicated on more definitive evidence.”¹ The expansion of formal truancy courts throughout the state has come without that additional evidence and research. In 2025, the legislature passed House Bill 1442 which requires a report on data, outcomes, and recommendation for current programs. In addition, in July 2025, the General Assembly authorized the creation of the Task Force to Improve Attendance and Reduce Chronic Absenteeism in Schools, which will complete its work in December 2026.² The legislature should not approve any expansion of the program into new counties without the benefit of these reports.

MOPD agrees that young people are more likely to thrive when they attend and are engaged in school; however, we do not believe that involvement in a truancy court is the most effective intervention to achieve that goal and can, in fact, have negative consequences. Research has repeatedly shown that a single court appearance increases the chance that a young person will drop out of school.³

¹ 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.

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,

Truancy and attendance issues are often due to a complex array of factors, including unmet or unidentified academic needs, student discipline, lack of appropriate social emotional/behavior support, as well as family issues, poverty, homelessness, transportation issues, safety concerns, trauma, and mental health challenges. MOPD represents students with a wide range of academic and mental health needs throughout the state. Many of our clients have experienced years of school failure; and yet are never referred for an evaluation to determine if they have a disability impacting their ability to access the curriculum. The relationship between school attendance and academic achievement is well documented and students with disabilities are at greater risk for absenteeism.⁴ Students may express frustration or exhibit behavior related to a disability, which can lead to school discipline, and ultimately lack of engagement and chronic absenteeism.

We also know that chronic absenteeism disproportionately impacts students of color and students with disabilities at the highest rates. Chronic absence rates in the 2023-2024 school year were highest for Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino students and students in special service groups, such as students with disabilities and economically disadvantaged students.⁵ In 2025, Black students with disabilities had one of the highest risks of chronic absenteeism.⁶ The disproportionate impact of school discipline on students of color and students with disabilities further contributes to this disengagement.

Even the application of attendance policies can be imposed in ways that lead to a disparate impact on students of color and low income students being referred for court intervention.⁷ Rather than expanding court involvement, MOPD urges the state and school

Who Will Graduate? Disruption of High School Education by Arrest and Court Involvement, 23 Justice Quarterly 4 (2006).

⁴ National Center on Education Outcomes, *Students with Disabilities and Chronic Absenteeism*, NCEO Brief Number 15, April 2018; <https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/OnlinePubs/NCEOBrief15.pdf>.

⁵ See MSDE's Aligned Metrics Update Presentation (Jan. 28, 2025),

<https://marylandpublicschools.org/stateboard/Documents/2025/0128/AM/Chronic-Absenteeism-A.pdf>.

⁶ In 2025, Black students with disabilities had a chronic absenteeism rate of roughly 40% as compared to all students with disabilities. See *Maryland Report Card - Demographics - Chronic Absenteeism* (2025),

<https://reportcard.msde.maryland.gov/Graphs/#/Demographics/ChronicAbsenteeism/3/17/2/6/99/XXXX/2025>.

⁷ Clea McNeeley, et al., *Unpacking Unexcused Absences in Maryland: A Working Paper*, Attendance Works <https://www.attendanceworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Unpacking-Unexcused-Absences-In-MD-April-22-2025-052325.pdf>; Clea McNeeley, et al., *Exploring an Unexamined Source of Racial Disparities in Juvenile Court Involvement: Unexcused Absenteeism Policies in U.S. Schools*, AERA Open, Vol. 7, (2021); https://www.attendanceworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Clea_McNeeley_AERA_Open_April_2021.pdf.

systems to focus on restorative practices and evidence-based interventions that are non-punitive and center on prevention, including schoolwide strategies that improve school climate and school engagement, as well as individual student focused interventions, such as special education services and student supports.⁸

In addition to the lack of evidence to support the efficacy of court-based truancy programs, the program proposed by SB 715 comes with the risk of specific harms to the youth it intends to serve. While federal law prohibits the incarceration of youth for truancy and other status offenses alone, a child can still be detained for violation of a valid court order. For states that run truancy prevention through the formal court system, this can lead to incarceration or punitive consequences of children for truancy-related reasons.⁹ Indeed, Maryland's truancy courts programs model juvenile court procedures with "adjudication" and "disposition" hearings.¹⁰ Establishing a program that operates through the judiciary will only serve to increase the likelihood of youth being pulled deeper into the juvenile justice system and divert funding and emphasis away from the evidence-based best practices to address truancy. Maryland should join states like Connecticut which have purposefully ended court involvement in truancy recognizing that juvenile court is not the appropriate venue for addressing this issue and can in fact have negative consequences.¹¹

Moreover, an expansion of court involved truancy reduction programs runs counter to Maryland's focus on restorative practices and what the [Blueprint for Maryland's Future](#) has accomplished through the continued development of community schools which provide a wide array of wraparound services that enhance students' ability to be successful. Community schools work with other agencies and providers to address the barriers to academic success without the threat of court intervention. This model, along with the student-focused services such as increased academic supports, special education services, behavior intervention plans, counseling,

⁸ Student supports can include counseling, a functional behavior assessment and behavior intervention plan, tutoring, mentoring, and peer support, among other interventions, including "response to intervention" (RTI) services to address academic needs.

⁹ In 2016, the largest number of out-of-home placements for adjudicated status offenders was for truancy at 24%. See National Center for Juvenile Justice and OJJDP, *Juvenile Court Statistics (2016)*, at 80; <http://ncjj.org/pdf/jcsreports/jcs2016report.pdf>.

¹⁰ See, e.g. Maryland's First Circuit Judicial Reduction Program at <https://www.courts.state.md.us/circuit/worcester/truancy>.

¹¹ Connecticut State Department of Education, *Catalog of Truancy Based Interventions* (2018); https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Truancy/TruancyInterventionCatalog_FINAL.pdf.

social work services, and mentoring programs, are the more holistic and supportive interventions with proven results for reducing chronic absenteeism and truancy, which MOPD advocates on a daily basis for our clients.¹² Truancy court programs are an outdated intervention which unnecessarily pulls children into the court system when other more effective interventions are available.

For these reasons, the Maryland Office of the Public Defender urges this Committee to issue an unfavorable report on SB 715.

Submitted by: Maryland Office of the Public Defender, Government Relations Division.

**Authored by: Alyssa Fieo, Education Attorney/Assistant Public Defender
alyssa.fieo@maryland.gov**

¹² 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>.

CRSD SB 715 UNF Testimony 2026.docx.pdf

Uploaded by: Kelly Quinn

Position: UNF

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
CRSDMaryland@gmail.com.

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