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House Ways and Means Committee
130 Taylor House Office Building
131 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Bill: House Bill 14 – County Boards of Education - Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation - Information Collection and Reporting Requirements

Position: Support

Dear Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Feldmark, and Members of the Committee:

The Maryland Psychological Association (MPA), which represents over 1,000 doctoral-level psychologists throughout the state, is writing in SUPPORT of House Bill 14 - County Boards of Education - Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation - Information Collection and Reporting Requirements. HB 14 will make a significant improvement to the current school bullying reporting form and enables more effective and targeted interventions to address and to prevent bullying in Maryland's public schools.

Student-on-student bullying in our schools has been a significant problem for a long time, and it has become substantially worse with the advent of cell phones and social media. Bullying can have a seriously adverse impact on a student's mental health. Bullying leads in some cases to intense anxiety, school avoidance, and even suicide. Maryland school systems have long recognized this issue and have made attempts to address it with well-crafted prevention and awareness programs, and with appropriate responses for both victims and perpetrators. Some years ago, MSDE established a standardized bullying incident report form for students and parents, and it made a meaningful difference in many cases. The new form provided school administrators with information to address the incident. Data are reported on system websites and to MSDE annually and they issue detailed reports based on the data provided. School systems also use this data to develop interventions at school and at system-wide levels.

HB 14 will make a substantial and necessary improvement in the data which are collected and reported by adding (when possible), the actual or perceived personal characteristic of the victim targeted by the bully. As defined in current law, these include race, national origin, marital status, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, ancestry, physical attributes, socioeconomic status, familial status, or physical or mental ability or disability. Currently this information is not included in the bullying report form. Collecting and analyzing this information will enable schools and school systems to better address the issue through more targeted prevention and intervention programs for many of these vulnerable students.

Thank you for considering our comments on HB 14. If we can provide any additional information or be of any assistance, please do not hesitate to contact the Chair of MPA's Legislative Committee, Dr. Stephanie Olarte, at mpalegislativcommittee@gmail.com.

Respectfully submitted,

Stephanie Wolf, JD, Ph.D.
Stephanie Wolf, JD, Ph.D.
President

Stephanie Olarte, Ph.D.
Stephanie Olarte, Ph.D.
Chair, MPA Legislative Committee

cc: Barbara Brocato & Dan Shattuck, MPA Government Affairs