

Written Testimony in Support of House Bill 1168

An Act Concerning Local School Systems -Sexual Abuse and Sexual Misconduct – Response Policy and After-Action

Submitted to: Maryland House of Delegates, Ways and Means Committee

Hearing Date: March 10, 2026

Submitted by: Jeremiah Grossman

Severna Park, Maryland

Madam Chair, Madam Vice Chair, and Members of the House Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Jeremiah Grossman, and I am providing written testimony in support of House Bill 1168. I am a Maryland parent, and both of my children have attended Severna Park Elementary School.

A. My family’s experience at Severna Park Elementary School

On March 18, 2024, parents of third-grade students at Severna Park Elementary School received the following message from the then-Principal:

Dear Third-Grade Families:

I am writing to let you know that [Teacher X] will be out of our school indefinitely and to inform you of how the class will be led during his absence.

While [Teacher X] is out, [Teacher Y] will be serving as the substitute and leading the class. [Teacher Y] is a former Anne Arundel County Public Schools teacher who served as a long-term sub for us in kindergarten earlier this year and has also substituted in several Severna Park cluster schools. She will begin leading the class when students return from Easter/Spring Break. Another substitute teacher will be teaching the class this week.

[Teacher Y’s] presence will provide stability for students, and she will work closely with other members of our third-grade team during her time here. I am

confident she will continue the high level of instruction to which your students are accustomed.

If you have questions or concerns you believe I can address, please contact the school.

Sincerely,

[Name of principal]

Principal

As the parent of a third-grader, this raised questions and concerns. I wrote the following message in response:

Hi [name of Principal],

Thank you for your message.

I'm sorry to hear about this. I imagine that [my son] (and other kids) will want to know why [Teacher X] is suddenly no longer teaching and whether he will be returning at some point. I realize that the details may be confidential, but at minimum it would be good to know if [Teacher X] has chosen to leave for personal reasons or if he was asked to leave for some reason. If the latter, we would want to be able to discuss with [my son] to ensure that he has not had any negative interactions that would need to be addressed. To be clear, I'm not assuming anything negative, I just want to be sure, since the circumstances of his departure were unclear from your message.

Thank you as always for everything you do for the students.

Sincerely,

Jerry

Shortly thereafter, the Principal responded as follows:

Good morning Mr. Grossman,

While I completely understand the concern and appreciate you checking in, I am unable to disclose private information of staff when they do go on leave. We are fortunate that [Teacher Y] is available and is a highly qualified teacher that will be able to pick up where [Teacher X] has left off. She will be in on Friday to meet with the rest of the third-grade teachers, [Teacher Z], and the rest of the team to discuss the needs of the classroom and ensure that our students continue to receive a top education. [School counselor] and I had a community circle with all 3rd grade classes this morning to inform students that [Teacher X] will be out and while he is out, we will be having a sub this week and then [Teacher Y] will be subbing after Spring Break. [School counselor] did share with students that if they did want to discuss any big feelings, that she is happy to meet and support them.

Sincerely,

[Name of principal]

Principal

Severna Park Elementary

(410) 222-6577

Over the ensuing weeks, rumors began circulating widely among parents and students regarding inappropriate behavior involving [Teacher X]. After three weeks of silence, the then-Principal sent the following message on April 7, 2024:

Dear Severna Park Elementary School Families and Staff:

Over the course of the last several days, there has been an increasing amount of concern among families about the absence from our building of one of our third-grade teachers, [Teacher X]. I am writing today to provide you with as much information as I can so that you can be assured of what has transpired.

First and foremost, I want to make abundantly clear that I have acted immediately, appropriately, and prudently with any information that has come to my attention. I have involved the appropriate departments and offices inside of our school system so that timely decisions could be made. Where necessary, outside agencies have been notified.

Except in conversations with families that are directly impacted, I cannot – and will not – detail the information that led to [Teacher X] being away from our building. Both the families involved and [Teacher X] have a right to privacy and confidentiality and a right to have this process play out in its entirety.

What I will say is that an allegation involving [Teacher X] was presented to me and, as is the normal course of action, I immediately reported that allegation to our school system's Office of Investigations so that it could be appropriately addressed. It is not uncommon for that office to remove staff from positions of direct contact with students while issues are investigated. Such an action does not imply guilt but is simply a precautionary measure to allow the investigation to take place without additional fear or anxiety being imposed on any party. From that point forward, the investigation is conducted by the Office of Investigations in conjunction with, where necessary, an appropriate law enforcement agency or agencies. My involvement at this time is to answer questions from those offices/agencies and provide any other information that comes to my attention.

In this case, third-grade families were notified on March 18, 2024, that [Teacher X] would be away from our building indefinitely and that [Teacher Y] would be the long-term substitute teacher in the class. Last week, I met with several other sets of families and provided the information they shared with me to the Office of Investigations as described above.

Our team has offered support to those involved in this case. We will continue to do that for as long as necessary. Please know that if your student has a need to talk about their feelings, they can ask any adult in our building to see our school counselor and additional student support staff that will be available in our building as necessary.

I fully realize both the emotion that comes with a situation like this and the frustration that accompanies not being able to be provided with every answer. I can simply assure you that the process is proceeding appropriately.

As it relates to the day-to-day operations of our building, our teachers, support staff, and administration will continue to provide quality instruction and support for every single one of our students. We will continue to endeavor to provide additional support – whether because of this matter or any other – to any student who needs it. Given the events of the last few days, we have decided to postpone the start of MCAP testing. That will begin on Tuesday.

If there is a point in time where I am able to share more information regarding this matter with you, please be assured I will do so.

Sincerely,

[Name of principal]

Principal

The above was the first and last communication from the then-Principal regarding this subject. On April 9, 2024, several parents tried to ask the Principal questions at the monthly PTO meeting. One asked if the school would inform her if her child had been placed at risk, and the Principal responded that the school could not comment. At that point, the PTO President stepped in and shut down further questions on the topic.

As for the school counselor, she was not authorized to proactively share information with the broader school population. For parents who e-mailed her to specifically request support, her primary resource was a list of therapists downloaded from Psychology Today as of August 2023 (without any information regarding their experience and training in child- and/or trauma-centered therapy). The other resource that she shared was a list of local therapists compiled by an SPES parent who was trained as a psychologist. This resource was far more valuable, and it was provided by a parent as opposed to by the school system.

In the absence of support from the school, parents were left to their own devices to determine how to address this topic with their children. Without any guidance, parents took various approaches, some of which ultimately led to the exclusion of potentially inculpatory evidence at trial.

Out of desperation, a few parents began sharing resources that they had collected, including (1) guidance on how to speak with children about sensitive topics; and (2) lists of qualified local therapists. Parents used homeroom e-mail lists to share helpful information with other parents. When the PTO President learned about this, she sent a strongly worded e-mail on April 16, 2024 warning that *“this is not an appropriate use of volunteer resources”* and that using these lists to share information on resources for parents *“is not only in violation of direction provided by the SPES PTO and the AACPS Volunteer Guide, but it could also present legal liability issues for the PTO, our volunteers and any individuals involved during an open investigation.”*

B. Why I support this Bill

I share all of this history not to cast blame but to highlight why House Bill 1168 is so critical. This Bill will address many of the issues that arose in the 2024 Severna Park Elementary School case. In particular:

- The Model Sexual Abuse and Misconduct Response Policy will provide local school systems with effective guidance to ensure that parents and guardians are kept informed and that key records are retained (Subsections B-C).
- In addition, the Bill establishes key disclosure requirements (Subsections D-F).
- Finally, the Bill mandates post-incident reviews to address weaknesses in (1) student protection; and (2) communication with parents and guardians (Subsection G).

C. Why this Bill is so important

A recent multistate study of high school graduates revealed a deeply troubling truth: **11.7% of students reported experiencing at least one form of educator sexual misconduct during their K–12 years.**¹ Most of these incidents were never reported to school personnel or law enforcement, and even when students did speak up, disciplinary action was rare.

Extrapolating to the State of Maryland, as of 2023 there were 69,538 12th grade students in Maryland public and private schools.² Based on that national average, **over 8,100 Maryland students will graduate having been subjected to sexual misconduct** by a teacher, coach, or other school employee. That's 8,100 young people—each year—who have been failed by the very system that was entrusted with their safety.

The consequences echo far beyond the classroom. Students who experience educator sexual misconduct are significantly more likely to use drugs and alcohol, to attempt suicide, and to find themselves in abusive or coercive relationships.

We cannot allow this to continue—not here, not in the State of Maryland.

Even one child should be too many. 8,100 per year is a moral crisis.

We can't change the past. But we can shape the future. And today, I ask you—I urge you—to seize this moment and commit to making Maryland schools the safest in the country—a model for the nation and the world in preventing, detecting, and responding to educator sexual misconduct. House Bill 1168 is an important step in the right direction.

¹ Jeglic et al. (2023), [The Nature and Scope of Educator Misconduct in K-12](#).

² Maryland Department of Planning (2024), [Public School Enrollment Projections 2024-2033](#), Appendix A-1.

Thank you,

Jeremiah Grossman