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**TESTIMONY ON HB#/0311- POSITION: FAVORABLE**

**Public Schools - Individuals With Disabilities - Accessibility and Emergency Planning**

**TO:** Chair Wilkins, Vice Chair Feldmark, and members of the Ways and Means Committee

**FROM:** Richard Keith Kaplowitz

My name is Richard Keith Kaplowitz. I am a resident of District 3, Frederick County. I am submitting this testimony in support of HB#/0311, **Public Schools - Individuals With Disabilities - Accessibility and Emergency Planning**

Disability Rights Maryland has identified a problem they are calling *The Civil Rights Crisis in Our Schools*<sup>1</sup>

The term “[school to prison pipeline](#)” refers to the link between school failure, zero-tolerance discipline policies, exclusionary discipline, school-based arrest, and the likelihood that youth who have these experiences in school will become involved in the juvenile, and later, adult criminal justice systems. Children of color and children with disabilities are overrepresented at all stops on the school to prison pipeline, beginning with exclusionary discipline and academic failure in early childhood.

The fact that Black children and children with disabilities are suspended and expelled more often than other children for the same offenses reflects the same inequalities that exist in the adult world. We live in a society where the rate at which Black men are subject to [imprisonment](#) is unparalleled, and where people with disabilities are at [disproportionate risk](#) of lethal encounters with law enforcement. [\[i\]](#) The deaths of [Freddie Gray](#) and [Ethan Saylor](#) indicate that Maryland is no exception.

This bill will deal with these issues by requiring each local school system to identify, in its regular safety evaluation, issues of accessibility for individuals with disabilities; requiring local school systems to include in a certain confidential annual report instances in which a public school facility became inaccessible for a student with a disability in a manner that could impede evacuations or emergency response; and requiring a certain annual report to be confidential and limiting disclosure of the report to certain individuals.

The data collected when the bill is passed can help guide future actions to remediate these problems. By passing the bill we live up to the motto that in Maryland we leave no one behind.

**I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on HB#/0311.**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://disabilityrightsmd.org/civil-rights-crisis/>