
MARYLAND COALITION TO REFORM SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

SENATE EDUCATION, HEALTH, AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE SENATE BILL 223: STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION – GUIDELINES ON TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH

February 6, 2019

POSITION: SUPPORT

The Maryland Coalition to Reform School Discipline (“CRSD”) brings together advocates, service providers, and concerned citizens interested in transforming school discipline practices within Maryland’s public school systems. We are committed to making discipline responsive to students’ behavioral needs, fair, appropriate to the infraction, and designed to keep youth on track to graduate. **CRSD strongly supports SB 223**, which would create a trauma-informed schools initiative within the Maryland State Department of Education to expand the use of the trauma-informed approach used in schools, intensively train schools on becoming trauma-informed schools, develop guidelines to assist schools, and create a fund to carry out this work.

According to the Treatment and Services Adaptation Center, a website with resources about trauma informed care in schools, one out of every four children attending school has been exposed to a traumatic event that can affect learning and/or behavior. Trauma can include situations such as abuse, abandonment, neglect, serious accidents, bullying, witnessing violence, or living in chronically chaotic environments in which housing and financial resources are not consistently available. In a trauma-informed school, the goal is to provide tools to the adults in the school community to address trauma, and to create an underlying culture of respect and support. <https://traumaawareschools.org/traumainschools> (February 4, 2019).

The benefits of implementing trauma informed care in Maryland schools cannot be overstated. Contrary to the notion of school as a supportive and nurturing environment, for example, during the 2015-16 school year, there were 2,761 school-related arrests in Maryland. Several jurisdictions had particularly high arrest numbers: Baltimore County with 393 arrests, Washington County with 249, Prince George’s County with 588, Montgomery County with 304, and St. Mary’s with 186.

CRSD organizations and members work with families whose children have been subjected to trauma. Passage of Senate Bill 223 would assist in creating a more positive school climate for students, one that recognizes the strengths that students bring to school each day but that also recognizes the support they need and provides that support in a respectful and nurturing way. The CRSD appreciates the multi-faceted approach of the bill – developing a program, requiring guidelines, setting parameters for expansion and creating a fund – which, make this a comprehensive bill that, if enacted, will make schools a better place for all children and all staff.

For these reasons, the CRSD strongly supports Senate Bill 223.

For more information contact:

Amanda R. White, Esq., M.P.H.
Staff Attorney, Disability Rights Maryland
443-692-2508
AmandaW@DisabilityRightsMD.org

CRSD Members

Advocates for Children and Youth
ACLU- Maryland
The Arc Maryland
Bmore Awesome Inc.
Choice Program
Disability Rights Maryland
Family League of Baltimore
NARAL- Pro-Choice Maryland
Office of the Public Defender
Positive Schools Center
Project HEAL at Kennedy Krieger Institute
Public Justice Center