
MARYLAND COALITION TO REFORM SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE HOUSE BILL 277: STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION – GUIDELINES ON TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH

FEBRUARY 5, 2020

POSITION: SUPPORT

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. 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 House Bill 277**, which would create a trauma-informed schools initiative within the Maryland State Department of Education to expand the use of a trauma-informed approach in schools, intensively train schools on becoming trauma-informed, develop guidelines to assist schools, and create a fund to carry out this work.

According to the Treatment and Services Adaptation Center, 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 primary goals are to provide tools to the adults in the school community to address trauma and to create an underlying culture of respect and support.¹

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, during the 2017-18 school year, there were 3,167 school-related arrests in Maryland. Several jurisdictions had particularly high arrest numbers: Baltimore County with 531 arrests, Prince George’s County with 350, Anne Arundel County with 334, Washington County with 282, and St. Mary’s County with 238.² These high numbers of arrests are just one example of schools not meeting the needs of students suffering from trauma.

CRSD organizations and members work with families whose children live with trauma. Passage of House Bill 277 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. CRSD appreciates the multi-faceted approach of the bill – developing a program, requiring guidelines, setting

¹ See What Is a Trauma-Informed School? Treatment and Services Adaptation Center, <https://traumaawareschools.org/traumainschools>.

² Maryland Public Schools Arrest Data: School Year 2017-2018, Maryland State Department of Education, <http://marylandpublicschools.org/about/Documents/DSFSS/SSSP/StudentArrest/MarylandPublicSchoolsArrestDataSY20172018.pdf>.

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 staff.

For these reasons, CRSD strongly supports House Bill 277.

For more information contact:

Renuka Rege
Staff Attorney, Public Justice Center
410-625-9409
reger@publicjustice.org

CRSD Members

ACLU Maryland
Advocates for Children and Youth
The Arc Maryland
Disability Rights Maryland
Family League of Baltimore
Gail L. Sunderman
Janna Parker
Lindsay Emery
NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland
Office of the Public Defender
Positive Schools Center
Project HEAL at Kennedy Krieger Institute
Public Justice Center
Restorative Response Baltimore
Shamarla R. McCoy
Teachers' Democracy Project
Youth, Education and Justice Clinic at University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law