

MARYLAND COALITION TO REFORM SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

MARYLAND GENERAL ASSEMBLY PASSES BILLS TO BAN SUSPENSION OF YOUNG LEARNERS AND TO CREATE A COMMISSION TO STUDY RESTORATIVE PRACTICES

BALTIMORE, April 11, 2017

CONTACT: Nicole Joseph, Disability Rights Maryland, nicolej@disabilityrightsmd.org, (443) 692- 2490

Legislation to ban suspension of Maryland’s youngest learners (SB651/HB425) and legislation to create a commission to study restorative practices (HB1287) passed the Maryland General Assembly.

The passage of SB651/HB425 bans the suspension and expulsion of pre-kindergarten through second grade students, except where the student would create an imminent risk of serious harm as determined by an administrator in consultation with a mental health professional.

In the 2015-2016 school year, 2,363 children in pre-kindergarten through second grade were suspended or expelled; nearly a quarter of those removals were for a vague category of behavior called “disruption.” These exclusions from school deny children critical opportunities to learn academic and social skills during a foundational time in their development, and lead to negative consequences both in school and later in life, including increasing the likelihood of involvement in the juvenile justice system. Suspensions are disproportionately applied to students with disabilities and African-American students. African American students accounted for 64% of all students suspended statewide, yet represented only 34.4% of the total student population. Students with disabilities accounted for 25.4% of all students suspended statewide, yet represented only 11.9% of the total student population.¹ Research demonstrates that problematic childhood behaviors are better addressed through classroom management, positive behavior supports, and other evidence-based interventions, and that suspension does not change behavior or make schools safer.

Therefore, additionally, the **Maryland General Assembly passed HB 1287, which creates a Commission on the School-to-Prison Pipeline to study the link between discipline and student arrests, as well as the use of restorative practices in Maryland schools.** “Restorative Practices” are alternative whole-school models of addressing conflict that use informal and formal processes to emphasize the importance of mutual respect, cultural understanding, healing, and in particular, taking personal accountability for actions. Some Maryland schools have already implemented restorative practices and found that they improve school climate and create a more equitable discipline system.

CRSD thanks sponsors of SB 651 and HB425, Sen. Will Smith and Del. Brooke Lierman, for leading the suspension ban effort; HB1287 sponsor, Alonzo Washington, for his two-year effort; and the relevant committee and subcommittee chairs, Sen. Joan Carter Conway, Sen. Paul Pinsky, Del. Anne Kaiser, and Del. Eric Luedtke, for their support.

“By passing these bills, Maryland has shown a commitment to rejecting discipline practices that do not work and to addressing the disproportionate exclusion from school of students with disabilities and African-American

¹ http://archives.marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE/divisions/planningresultstest/doc/20152016Student/2016ProdSuspExpulHRExc-rev11012016_Accessible.pdf

students,” said Nicole Joseph, chair of the Maryland Coalition to Reform School Discipline and special education attorney at Disability Rights Maryland.

The Maryland Coalition to Reform School Discipline is committed to making school discipline practices in Maryland schools fair, appropriate, and designed to keep youth in school and on track to graduate. Unfortunately, discipline disparities plague the system. Our members include direct service and public policy advocates working in support of families and communities to make schools safe and welcoming environments that are responsive to students' socio-emotional and academic needs.

###