

BILL: House Bill 1407
TITLE: Public Schools - Reporting of Assaults, Crimes of Violence, and Felonies (Report Act of 2020)
POSITION: OPPOSE
DATE: March 4, 2020
COMMITTEE: Ways and Means Committee
CONTACT: John R. Woolums, Esq.

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) opposes House Bill 1407 because it would authorize teachers to invoke a student disciplinary process in response to student behavior that may not conform to policies adopted by their local board of education.

Every local board of education places a high priority on establishing policies and procedures concerning student discipline, based on a framework established by the General Assembly and the State Board of Education. State law reflects the legislature's recognition that principals and superintendents have broad discretion to make student discipline decisions "as warranted" (Section 7-305 of the Education Article). State regulations long mirrored this deference to local decision making, as well as placing a clear emphasis on maintaining a safe learning environment for all students.

MABE strongly believes that safety in public schools is the joint responsibility of local boards of education, school administrators and staff, students, parents and guardians, law enforcement, the courts, and other public safety agencies, human services agencies, and the community in general. Local school boards take very seriously the need for strict and comprehensive student discipline and school safety policies that focus on controlling and/or preventing bullying, verbal threats, student fights, and the numerous other actions which can disrupt effective teaching and learning and potentially lead to more serious behavior. And, while school safety issues are much more complex than the challenges of preventing and responding to instances of extreme violence by students, such incidents do occur.

MABE also believes that restorative approaches should play an integral role in the administration of Maryland's public schools. Such proactive practices, implemented following appropriate professional development and training of all staff, can make significant improvements in school climate and the learning conditions for all students to learn. Maryland school systems are committed to each and all of their students becoming college and career ready and ensuring that the appropriate use of school discipline furthers that goal.

Legislation enacted in 2019 requires local boards of education to revise local board policies related to student discipline to provide for restorative practices. This new law defines "restorative approaches" as a relationship-focused student discipline model that: (1) is preventative and proactive; (2) emphasizes building strong relationships and setting clear behavioral expectations that contribute to the school community well-being; (3) in response to behavior that violates clear behavioral expectations, focuses on accountability for any harm done by the problem behavior; and (4) addresses ways to repair the relationships affected by the problem behavior with the voluntary participation of an individual who was harmed.

For the reasons outlined above, MABE requests an unfavorable report on House Bill 1407.