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# MARYLAND COALITION TO REFORM SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

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## JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

### HOUSE BILL 71: JUVENILE SERVICES EDUCATION BOARD AND PROGRAM- ESTABLISHMENT, POWERS, AND DUTIES

January 28, 2021

#### 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 system. 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 supports HB 71**, which, among other things, will establish an independent school board for the Juvenile Services Education System.

CRSD members have been advocating for years for improved educational services and outcomes for students held in Department of Juvenile Services (DJS) placements who are receiving these services through a branch of the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) called Juvenile Services Education (JSE). Numerous administrative complaints filed with MSDE over the past several years uncovered a host of problems with the delivery of special education and related services, as well as problems with the basic educational services offered to all students. These ongoing concerns include: lack of teachers, including special education staff; lack of access to courses; problems calculating course credits; and lack of high-quality educational services. Professor Peter Leone, a juvenile justice education expert from the University of Maryland, was contracted by JSE to monitor the implementation of their strategic plan. While there were minimal improvements with Dr. Leone's involvement, it is not sufficient and we remain concerned about JSE's ability to serve these students effectively due to infrastructure and resource limitations.

The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated the problems with the current JSE education model. Although JSES purports to offer live teaching, students report they have been unable to interact with their teachers in real time. Students in quarantine report having access only to work packets, which are sometimes too difficult to complete without teacher support. Students are blocked from sites like dictionary.com., CNN10, and educational resource sites. They are unable to access certain course curriculum and they do not have access to sites like Google Docs to submit their required writing assignments. Additionally, students report being erroneously given packets rather than live instruction, being given the same packets as last year, or receiving the wrong packets altogether.

The Blueprint for Maryland's Future proposed a funding scheme that would create a world-class

educational system for Maryland. We hope that the creation of an independent school board will ensure that the students in JSE schools are afforded the benefits of this world-class education as well. We want to stress the importance of providing resources for students in state custody, particularly in juvenile justice programs, in planning for the success of our state. Many of these students have disabilities and are members of other at-risk groups. It is important to address their needs and to provide them with quality educational services and access to much-needed resources.

Recognizing that education is a primary strategy for curbing recidivism and keeping students out of the school-to-prison pipeline, this population of students cannot wait any longer for significant changes and are entitled to improved outcomes. We believe that something must be done to address the structural barriers to providing quality education to our at-risk youth. It is our hope that the creation of an independent school board will remedy the structural barriers, such as lack of staffing, budget, and curriculum availability that this vulnerable population of students currently faces and will ensure that our at-risk youth have access to quality instruction from certified teachers, course availability, and planning for transition back to the community.

**For these reasons, CRSD supports HB 71.**

For more information contact:

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