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Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 1114
Education - Prohibited Behavior on School Grounds and Property - Application

House Ways and Means Committee

March 8, 2023

1:00pm

The Baltimore Teachers Union supports House Bill 1114, which would repeal penalties for students attending public schools who create disturbances or willfully prevent the orderly conduct of school activities. As we encounter an increasing number of students who are using protest methods, we should not criminalize these students for exercising their first amendment rights.

The Baltimore Teachers Union represents 8,280 teachers, paraprofessionals, counselors, clinicians, librarians, secretaries, community school site specialists, bus transportation aides, and many more school-based and central office support staff. We are 4 out of 5 workers in Baltimore City Public Schools, serving 75,595 students and their families. Our national union, the American Federation of Teachers, has over 1.7 million members in the United States and its territories.

Laws that impose criminal penalties for vague or minor infractions are commonly used disproportionately to punish students from marginalized groups. House Bill 1114 seeks to repeal penalties that could be used to unjustly punish young people who are protesting issues that affect them directly. If students are acting in a way that substantially harms their fellow students' access to education, there remain disciplinary consequences for those actions. Disciplinary codes, not criminal charges, are the correct and appropriate vehicle for addressing student behavior connected to protests. For this reason, we urge the committee to adopt a favorable report on House Bill 1114.