



**Informational Testimony for:
House Bill 197: Public Schools – Restorative Practices Schools – Comprehensive Plan**

Ways and Means Committee

Position: Informational

January 29, 2025

Strong Schools Maryland wishes to provide the following testimony related to House Bill 197, Public Schools – Restorative Practices Schools – Comprehensive Plan. Restorative approaches to school discipline, and restorative practices broadly, are a logical complement to the work Maryland is doing to build a statewide World Class Education system under the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future. In short, schools thrive when their communities thrive, and school communities thrive when everyone is secure in their sense of belonging to that community.

If Maryland is to succeed in creating that system of World Class Schools, adults in school buildings and at central offices will have to do away with the notion that anyone—student or staff—is disposable. It is incongruent and unfair to expect that educators at the school level will build supportive, restorative cultures in their buildings while being managed by central office and state leaders who may still subscribe to punitive, dominance-centered models of discipline and supervision.

In 2018, the state’s Commission on the School-to-Prison Pipeline and Restorative Practices produced [a report](#) that recommended many changes that are reflected in this bill. Restorative practices have been shown to address inequities in disciplinary practices, particularly those that disproportionately affect students of color and students with disabilities.¹ We urge that the bill place a stronger emphasis on racial equity and cultural competency, key components of the Commission’s original work.

While we are generally supportive of HB 197, we have a few recommendations:

- We recommend that the bill broaden the data collection criteria for measuring the success of restorative practices beyond disciplinary outcomes. The true impact of restorative practices is better understood through metrics such as staff retention, teacher satisfaction, parent involvement, and student and staff perceptions of safety and belonging within the school community.
- We suggest that MSDE convenes a group of experts in Restorative Practices from across the state, particularly those with experience implementing restorative practices through a culturally responsive and racially equitable lens. Their expertise would be invaluable in shaping the plan and ensuring it meets the diverse needs of all students, teachers, and administration.
- Finally, restorative practices must be supported by adequate funding to ensure their effective implementation. Without sufficient resources, even the best plans will fall short.

We appreciate the committee’s consideration of these points and are committed to supporting the successful implementation of restorative practices in Maryland’s schools.

Please contact Riya Gupta at riya@strongschoolsmaryland.org for additional questions.

¹US Department of Education Office for Civil Rights. 2014. Civil rights data collection. Data snapshot: School discipline. Brief No. 1