



LEGISLATIVE BLACK CAUCUS OF MARYLAND, INC.

The Maryland House of Delegates, 6 Bladen Street, Room 300, Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3185 • 301-858-3185 • 800-492-7122 Ext. 3185 • Fax 410-841-3175 • 301-858-3175 • Black.Caucus@house.state.md.us

January 29, 2025

EXECUTIVE OFFICERS

Chair

Delegate Jheanelle Wilkins, District 20

1st Vice Chair

Delegate Melissa Wells, District 40

2nd Vice Chair

Delegate Karen R. Tolos, District 25

Treasurer

Delegate Marlon Amprey, District 40

Secretary

Delegate Jamila J. Woods, District 26

Financial Secretary

Senator Arthur Ellis, District 28

Chaplain

Delegate Jeffrie E. Long, Jr., District 27B

Parliamentarian

Delegate Stephanie Smith, District 45

Historian

Delegate Cheryl E. Pasteur, District 11A

Executive Director

Ufuoma O. Agarin, J.D.

MEMBERS

Senator Malcolm Augustine, District 47

Senator Benjamin Brooks, District 10

Senator Jill P. Carter, District 41

Senator Nick Charles, District 25

Senator Antonio L. Hayes, District 40

Senator Michael A. Jackson, District 27

Senator Cory V. McCray, District 45

Senator C. Anthony Muse, District 26

Senator William C. Smith, Jr., District 20

Senator Charles E. Sydnor III, Esq., District 44

Senator Alonzo T. Washington, District 22

Senator Mary L. Washington, District 43

Senator Ron Watson, District 23

Delegate Gabriel Acevero, District 39

Delegate Jacqueline T. Addison, District 45

Delegate Tiffany Alston, District 24

Delegate Vanessa E. Atterbeary, District 13

Delegate J. Sandy Bartlett, District 32

Delegate Adrian Boofo, District 23

Delegate Regina T. Boyce, District 43A

Delegate Frank M. Conway, Jr., District 40

Delegate Charlotte Crouchfield, District 19

Delegate Dabra Davis, District 28

Delegate Diana M. Fennell, District 47A

Delegate Kevin M. Harris, District 27A

Delegate Andrea Fletcher Harrison, District 24

Delegate Shaneka Henson, District 30A

Delegate Terri L. Hill, District 12

Delegate Marvin E. Holmes, Jr., District 23

Delegate Julian Ivey, District 47A

Delegate Carl Jackson, District 8

Delegate Andre V. Johnson, Jr., District 34A

Delegate Adrienne A. Jones, District 10

Delegate Jazz Lewis, District 24

Delegate Robbyn Lewis, District 46

Delegate Ashanti Martinez, District 22

Delegate Aletheia McCaskill, District 44B

Delegate Bernice Mireku-North, District 14

Delegate Edith J. Patterson, District 28

Delegate Joseline Peña-Melnyk, District 21

Delegate N. Scott Phillips, District 10

Delegate Pamela Queen, District 14

Delegate Kent Roberson, District 25

Delegate Denise G. Roberts, District 25

Delegate Mike Rogers, District 32

Delegate Malcolm P. Ruff, District 41

Delegate Gary Simmons, District 12B

Delegate Dani Tavaras, District 47B

Delegate Kym Taylor, District 23

Delegate Veronica Turner, District 26

Delegate Jennifer White Holland, District 10

Delegate Nicole A. Williams, District 22

Delegate C.T. Wilson, District 28

Delegate Greg Wims, District 39

Delegate Caylin Young, District 45

Chairwoman Vanessa E. Atterbeary
Ways and Means Committee
130 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and Members of the Committee,

The Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland offers its strong and favorable support for House Bill 197 (HB197) – Public Schools – Restorative Practices Schools – Comprehensive Plan. The bill is a **Black Caucus 2025 legislative priority bill**, and introduces essential reforms to Maryland's student discipline system by requiring the Maryland State Department of Education to develop a comprehensive plan for the establishment of Restorative Practices Schools.

Restorative practices provide an alternative to traditional, punitive forms of discipline by focusing on repairing harm, building stronger relationships, and promoting accountability within the school community. For Black children in Maryland, who are often overrepresented in school discipline data, restorative practices offer a more inclusive and supportive approach that can break the cycle of exclusionary discipline, such as suspensions and expulsions. Research consistently shows that Black students are more likely to face severe disciplinary actions for similar behaviors when compared to their White peers, which contributes to the school-to-prison pipeline and exacerbates educational disparities. House Bill 197 represents an important opportunity to address these systemic issues by integrating restorative practices into the core of our school culture.

By requiring the Maryland State Department of Education to create a comprehensive plan for Restorative Practices Schools, House Bill 197 ensures that these practices are not just an optional initiative but a systemic shift in how we approach student behavior and discipline across Maryland. The bill mandates the development of a framework that will train school personnel as Restorative Practices Coaches and provide model training materials to integrate these practices schoolwide. For Black children in particular, this means that their needs for support, understanding, and healing will be prioritized over punitive measures. The bill also establishes clear metrics for success, including reductions in disciplinary actions, absenteeism, and teacher turnover—areas where Black students are often disproportionately affected.

Moreover, the bill's emphasis on training school staff and administrators in restorative practices ensures that Black children in Maryland schools will have a better chance of receiving the understanding and support they need when they

make mistakes. Restorative practices help build stronger connections between students and educators, helping to address underlying issues like trauma or unmet social-emotional needs—issues that disproportionately affect Black children due to historical and ongoing social inequalities. By fostering an environment where students feel heard, respected, and valued, we can create safer, more equitable schools for Black students, who are often subjected to racial biases in traditional discipline processes.

For instance, national studies have shown that Black children face higher rates of suspension and expulsion for subjective offenses, such as “disruption” or “insubordination,” which are open to interpretation and often influenced by unconscious bias. This bill offers an important opportunity to change the narrative for Black students in Maryland. By prioritizing restorative approaches over traditional discipline methods, we can ensure that Black students are not pushed out of schools but instead remain engaged in learning and personal growth.

Additionally, House Bill 197’s mandate to track key data, such as student conduct, absenteeism, and school climate indicators, provides a powerful tool for monitoring the bill's effectiveness and ensuring that progress is being made toward equitable outcomes. This data will allow policymakers and educators to identify and address any remaining disparities, ensuring that Black students are not left behind.

The Black Caucus believes that this bill offers a critical pathway to reforming Maryland’s student discipline system in a way that promotes equity, inclusivity, and fairness for all students, particularly Black children, who have long been subject to disparate treatment in schools. For these reasons, the Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland strongly supports House Bill 197.
Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland

Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland