



LEGISLATIVE BLACK CAUCUS OF MARYLAND, INC.

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January 29, 2025

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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

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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

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