



TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

HB 84 Education – Crimes on School Grounds - Application

POSITION: Support

BY: Nancy Soreng – President

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The League of Women Voters of Maryland (LWVMD) **supports House Bill 84**, which would exempt students at the educational institution they attend, students currently on exclusionary discipline from their educational institution, and students who are participating in or attending a sporting event or extracurricular activity at another school from the offenses specified in Maryland Education Code § 26-101. LWVMD supports a comprehensive range of child-centered services to ensure all children have a chance to grow toward stable, productive adulthood.

This statute criminalizes a broad range of student behaviors that are often based on subjective interpretations by school officials and school police officers. It includes behaviors such as “willful disturbance” and “threat” that are vague, open to subjective interpretation, and overly broad. Because of the subjectivity inherent in these offenses, they disproportionately impact students of color and students with disabilities, and criminalize normal adolescent and youth behavior. Criminalizing student behavior has long term negative impacts, including the risk of dropping out of school, increased involvement with the criminal justice system (i.e., school-to-prison pipeline), and decreased success later in life.

The LWVMD has a long-standing history of support for an equitable and accessible educational system. In that vein, public policy needs to move away from criminalizing student behavior and develop ways to support students, address their developmental and behavioral health needs, and develop policies and practices that keep them out of the criminal justice system. HB 84 points us in that direction by moving away from laws, policies and practices that criminalize student behavior.

The League urges the committee to give a favorable report to House Bill 84.