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Testimony before the Appropriations Committee

In SUPPORT of House Bill 1346- Student Peer Mediation Program Fund- Establishment

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Traditionally punitive approaches to school discipline fail to treat young people as whole humans who are members of a school community. In fact, those approaches to instances of conflict between students push them out of class, out of the school building, and in some extreme cases, out of the school district entirely. In the 2015-2016 school year more than 2500 student arrests occurred in Maryland's public schools¹, **with a disproportionate number of those arrests being of Black, low-income, male, and/or students with disabilities.**

Peer mediation is a concrete restorative practice under the umbrella of restorative approaches to school discipline, which focus on repairing the harm that was done, rather than simply handing out punishments. This model holds offenders responsible for their behavior by providing opportunities for them to repair the harm they've caused in a given situation, guiding all involved parties to a positive resolution, and giving victims of an infraction agency to join the accountability process and have their needs met.² **The ultimate goal of restorative approaches is not to kick a student out of school--instead, each student is seen as a part of the school community and held accountable for their actions with the ultimate goal of welcoming that student back into the school community.**

Peer mediation in particular is a practice in which the two or more individuals involved in a dispute meet in a private setting to address the dispute with the guidance of a trained mediator. The resolution is mutually agreed upon, which gives peer mediation the added benefit of presenting restorative solutions that are an appropriate "fit" for the parties involved, rather than an ultimatum posed by an external authority figure.

Appropriate training of mediators is integral to the success of the practice and poses a cost to schools. House Bill 1346 will create a fund to which schools and community-based organizations may apply in an effort to expand the use of a student peer mediation model with youth in Baltimore City. **ACY urges a favorable report on this bill.**

¹ Maryland State Department of Education. *Maryland Public Schools Arrest Data: School Year 2015-2016*. 2017.

² San Francisco Unified School District. *Restorative Practices Whole-School Implementation Guide*. Page 19.