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Testimony before the Ways and Means Committee

In OPPOSITION to House Bill 45- Accountability in Education Act of 2019

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Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 45- Accountability in Education Act of 2019. Advocates for Children and Youth (ACY) opposes this bill.

ACY agrees that upholding the civil rights of students, families, and teachers, appropriately reporting child abuse, neglect, and information which can be used to assess the quality of Maryland public schools is an important endeavor. Currently, the State Board of Education, State Superintendent, State Comptroller, and the Office of Legislative Audits jointly achieve the ends described by the bill. Given that reality and in the absence of evidence demonstrating ineptitude in one of the above agencies, the fiscal impact of this legislation (~\$4 million by FY 2024) does not present a convincing cost-benefit conclusion.

Baltimore and Hartford counties are currently facing funding shortfalls for their respective public school systems and are looking to cutting positions and eliminating promised teacher pay raises to fill that gap. Baltimore City Public Schools made clear its position that the district is owed operating and backlogged capital funds by the State. It is unconscionable to think that in the face of the Kirwan Commission's recommendations, while LEAs across the state are fighting to fund basic services for students, like special education and English Language teachers, the State would (1) spend millions to establish a new body to achieve ends that are currently being met and (2) require LEAs to divert more money away from students if they are investigated.

More immediately concerning than the financial implications for the State and for LEAs is that this bill serves to further harmful narratives about the ability of LEAs to manage their own operations, a narrative well-documented, but as yet unfounded, in local media. The bill also fails to specify the process by which complaints will be made to the Education Monitoring Unit, leaving us to assume that no measures exist to protect individuals from marginalized communities from being targeted by these complaints.

HB 45 will place an as-yet-undetermined financial burden on LEAs across the state, in the pursuit of powers that exist in the status quo. In light of the need to fund the recommendations of the Kirwan Commission, the existing strain on LEA budgets across the state, and the absence of proof that this legislation won't further harmful narratives about marginalized groups, **ACY respectfully requests an unfavorable report on this bill.**

