

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 08, 2023

Contact: Diane Cooper-Gould & Michelle Cades

Advocacy@fairfaxcountysepta.org



COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS OPPOSE HARMFUL CHANGES TO SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

The undersigned 24 Virginia organizations join together to STRONGLY OPPOSE Virginia House Bill 1461. HB1461 requires the state to establish a uniform system of discipline, mandating classroom removals for subjective interpretations of “disruptive” student behavior, without context, and without addressing the underlying reason for the behavior nor strategies for how to address the behavior.

We call on our elected officials to vote down this bill. It will harm students with disabilities, students of color, low-income students and male students - especially those who fall into more than one of these groups - as well as students who have experienced trauma. Multiple studies show that these students are already disproportionately subjected to discipline by schools. This bill will worsen the disparities.

HB1461 removes decision-making from our local school divisions and teachers, with the state mandating procedures for removing and returning the student to the classroom. Education for students with disabilities must be individualized. Every student is unique in their strengths and needs, and every “disruptive” behavior has a unique cause. School staff should follow best practices to address challenging behaviors, not be forced to respond to every situation in an identical manner.

Additionally, under this legislation, students would be removed from class automatically for “violent” behavior. Students with disabilities have already been wrongly subjected to physical restraint and seclusion for so-called “violent” classroom behavior as mild as ripping up papers, shouting, and throwing a pencil or a toy. Extreme punishments have been inflicted upon students whose behavior is, in fact, not dangerous but rather a form of attempted communication, dysregulation, or a manifestation of their disability.

HB1461 will worsen inequities for students in marginalized groups, such as BIPOC students, in a state that already has one of the highest disproportionality rates in the country for referring students to law enforcement, without making our schools any safer. We oppose this bill and we call on our legislators to oppose it too.

Fairfax County Special Education PTA Arlington Special Education PTA

Partner Organizations:

4 Public Education
Alliance Against Seclusion & Restraint
Arlington Education Association
Arlington Gender Identity Allies
Arlington Schools Hispanic Parents Association
Black Parents of Arlington
Communication First
Decoding Dyslexia of Virginia
disAbility Law Center of Virginia
Fairfax County Federation of Teachers
Fairfax County NAACP

FCPS Pride
Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington
Legal Aid Justice Center
Mental Health America of Virginia
National Association of Social Workers - Virginia
Parents of Autistic Children
Prince William County Special Education PTA
Promise to Address Childhood Trauma
The ARC of Northern Virginia
Virginia Autism Project
Voices for Virginia's Children