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**BALTIMORE CITY COUNCIL
EDUCATION, YOUTH AND OLDER ADULT
COMMITTEE**

Mission Statement

On behalf of the Citizens of Baltimore City, the mission of the **Education, Youth, and Older Adults (EYOA) Committee** is to study, review, and recommend policies that enhance educational opportunities, support the well-being and development of young people, and improve the quality of life for older adults. The committee is committed to fostering equitable access to high-quality education, advocating for youth empowerment, and ensuring that aging residents have the resources and services necessary to thrive.

**The Honorable John Bullock
Chair**

PUBLIC HEARING

**THURSDAY, MARCH 6, 2025
12:00 PM**

COUNCIL CHAMBERS

**Council Bill – 25-0002
Study and Report – Absences in Baltimore City Schools**

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BILL SYNOPSIS

Committee: Education, Youth and Older Adult

Council Bill: 25-0002

Study and Report – Absences in Baltimore City Schools

Sponsor: Councilmember Conway

Introduced: January 13, 2025

Purpose:

For the purpose of requiring the Baltimore City Public School System ("City Schools") to prepare a report exploring the causes of student absences to better identify solutions to address the most persistent barriers students face to attending school; requiring City Schools to collaborate with certain City agencies to propose recommendations to address the root causes of unexcused absences found in the report; and providing for a special effective date.

Effective:

Agency Reports

City Solicitor	Unfavorable
Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs	Favorable
Baltimore City Public School System	None as of writing
Baltimore Police Department	Favorable
Mayor's Office of Children and Family Success	None as of writing
Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement	None as of writing
Mayor's Office of Employee Development	None as of writing

Mayor's Office of Homeless Services	Favorable
States' Attorney's Office	None as of writing
Mayor's Office of African American Male Engagement	Favorable

Analysis

Background

Introduced by Councilmember Conway and cosponsored by several other members of the City Council, this bill mandates a comprehensive study to explore the root causes of student absences, both excused and unexcused. The study will be conducted by the Baltimore City Public School System in collaboration with multiple city agencies, including the Baltimore Police Department, the Mayor's Office of Children and Family Success, and the Office of the State's Attorney for Baltimore City. By analyzing data from the 2023-2024 school year, the report will consider various factors such as economic status, transportation methods, and parental involvement, among others, to identify patterns and barriers contributing to absenteeism.

This bill is crucial for Baltimore because chronic absenteeism is a significant barrier to educational success and long-term economic mobility. The city faces systemic challenges such as poverty, transportation issues, and community safety concerns, all of which can contribute to school attendance problems. By requiring a data-driven approach to identifying and addressing absenteeism, the legislation seeks to create targeted interventions that can help improve student retention and academic performance. If properly implemented, the findings from this study can lead to policy changes and resource allocations that better support students and families, ultimately strengthening Baltimore's education system and workforce development.

Additional Information

Fiscal Note: The fiscal impact of Council Bill 25-0002 is currently incomplete due to the absence of an official report from the Baltimore City Public Schools agency. However, the legislation will likely require financial resources for data collection, analysis, and agency coordination. The study's costs may include staff time, outreach efforts to families, and data-sharing mechanisms among agencies. Additional funding may also be needed for implementing the recommendations that arise from the report, such as transportation support or community-based interventions. A complete fiscal analysis will be necessary to determine the exact financial

burden on the city and to identify potential funding sources, including local, state, and federal grants aimed at improving school attendance and student engagement.

Information Source(s): Reporting Agencies, 25-0002.

Deontre Hayes

Analysis by: Deontre Hayes
Analysis Date: March 4, 2025

Direct Inquiries to: (410) 396-1260

EDUCATION, YOUTH, AND OLDER ADULT COMMITTEE

AGENCY REPORTS

SEE ATTACHED

Baltimore City Council Bill 25-0002 **Study and Report – Absences in Baltimore City Schools**

Education, Youth, and Older Adults Committee
March 4, 2025

The Baltimore City Public School System (City Schools) **supports with amendments** Council Bill 25-0002, which seeks to ensure City Schools prepare a report exploring the causes of student absences to better identify solutions to address the most persistent barriers students face to attending school. It is the hope of the City Council that in producing such a report, policy recommendations may be developed for agencies to adopt and implement in an effort to reduce chronic absenteeism.

City Schools concurs with the Council’s attention to this important matter, and has long recognized the interplay between student attendance and long-term academic success. Thanks to a yearlong focus on attendance, City Schools’ year-to-year districtwide attendance last year increased by 1.8 percentage points over the previous year, meaning more than 30,000 students improved their attendance. Also encouraging, the number of chronically absent City Schools students decreased by 5.4 percentage points last year, while every other large Maryland school district experienced an increase.

City Schools’ chronic absenteeism rate is falling while other large Maryland districts experience increases

LEA	% Difference 2022 to 2023	Difference by students 2022 to 2023
City Schools	- 4.0 %	- 4,021 students
Baltimore Co.	+ 1.5 %	+ 1,405 students
Mont. Co.	+ 2.1 %	+ 3,565 students
Prince George’s	+ 3.3 %	+ 4,479 students
Anne Arundel	+ 1.1 %	+ 1,094 students

Source: Maryland Report Card -
<https://reportcard.msde.maryland.gov>

The district's improvements can be attributed to several factors, most notably our work to reduce chronic absenteeism through research-based strategies for school attendance teams. Highlights of these strategies include:

- Establishing an attendance team that meets weekly to review and take action on data and keeps school's School Family and Community Council apprised of challenges and next steps.
- Creating and putting in motion a plan to call all families of students who are not at school by a designated time in the morning and/or throughout the school day.
- Identifying and aligning resources that address the most common attendance concerns within the school and address root causes of individual student's absenteeism.
- Developing incentives at the school, grade, classroom and/or student level to encourage and celebrate strong and most improved attendance.
- Implementing a system of matching students who are chronically absent with resources and supports (i.e., check-in/check-out, a mentor) that can be monitored for effectiveness of improving outcomes.
- Engaging families through back-to-school celebrations and other events throughout the year.

In addition to the efforts outlined above, City Schools' creation of an onsite support model to 96 schools has also contributed to improvements in chronic absenteeism. The onsite support model includes three teams from the district's Attendance Team that go into schools to provide in-person support on chronic absenteeism, as well as barriers to attendance and truancy related issues and concerns. Each support team works collaboratively with schools on case management, attendance strategy, data, and other incentive programs in order to improve outcomes.

Among other efforts to combat chronic absenteeism is Baltimore's citywide initiative between City Schools and the Mayor's Office to emphasize the critical importance of daily school attendance. At the end of each quarter, Mayor Brandon Scott presents a trophy to the school that shows the greatest reduction in chronic absenteeism. The attendance campaign is continuing throughout the 2024-25 school year.

While these examples of critical district progress demonstrate City Schools' ongoing commitment to prioritizing attendance while seeking to reduce chronic absenteeism, the fact remains that any effort to further examine the root causes of student absence and subsequent opportunities for improvement is welcome.

City Schools supports Council Bill 25-0002 with amendments that are largely technical in nature and have been submitted prior to today's hearing through the bill's sponsor, Councilman Mark Conway. As noted in our amendments, City Schools looks forward to the City Council securing funding for this study so that we can get it underway. We appreciate the committee's consideration and respectfully urge a favorable with amendments report of Council Bill 25-0002.



CITY OF BALTIMORE
MAYOR BRANDON M. SCOTT

TO	The Honorable President and Members of the Baltimore City Council
FROM	Erin C. Murphy – Director of Government Relations – Baltimore Police Department
CC	Mayor’s Office of Government Relations
DATE	02/13/2025
SUBJECT	25-0002 Study and Report – Absences in Baltimore City Schools

Position: Favorable

BILL SYNOPSIS

The Baltimore Police Department (BPD) has reviewed Council Bill 25-0002, for the purpose of requiring the Baltimore City Public School System (“City Schools”) to prepare a report exploring the causes of student absences to better identify solutions to address the most persistent barriers students face to attending school; requiring City Schools to collaborate with certain City agencies to propose recommendations to address the root causes of unexcused absences found in the report; and providing for a special effective date.

SUMMARY OF POSITION

The Baltimore Police Department concurs that student absences are a serious issue and intends to cooperate to the greatest extent possible in developing solutions that will address the root causes of unexcused student absences.

FISCAL IMPACT

The Baltimore Police Department does not anticipate a fiscal impact if this legislation is enacted.

AMENDMENTS

The Baltimore Police Department has no requested amendments for Council Bill 25-0002.

CITY OF BALTIMORE

BRANDON M. SCOTT
Mayor



DEPARTMENT OF LAW
EBONY M. THOMPSON, CITY SOLICITOR
100 N. HOLLIDAY STREET
SUITE 101, CITY HALL
BALTIMORE, MD 21202

February 5, 2025

The Honorable President and Members
of the Baltimore City Council
Attn: Executive Secretary
Room 409, City Hall
100 N. Holliday Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21202

Re: City Council Bill 25-0002 – Study and Report – Absences in Baltimore City
Schools

Dear President and City Council Members:

The Law Department has reviewed City Council Bill 25-0002 for form and legal sufficiency. The bill is for the purpose of requiring the Baltimore City Public School System (“City Schools”) to prepare a report exploring the causes of student absences to better identify solutions to address the most persistent barriers students face to attending school; requiring City Schools to collaborate with certain City agencies to propose recommendations to address the root causes of unexcused absences found in the report; and providing for a special effective date.

The Mayor and City Council of Baltimore cannot require City Schools employees to create a report exploring the causes of student absences or to collaborate with certain City agencies. Section 4-302 of the Education Article of the Maryland Code and Section (30) of Article II of the Baltimore City Charter authorize the Mayor and City Council of Baltimore to establish and maintain a system of free public schools subject to the applicable provisions of the Education Article of the Code of Maryland. Section 4-303 of the Education Article of the Maryland Code establishes the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners (“BCBSC”) to oversee the operation of the Baltimore City Public School System.

“Under Maryland law, the City of Baltimore exercises no supervisory authority over City Schools or its employees; rather, these powers are vested in BCBSC.” *Gaskins v. Baltimore City Public Schools*, No. JKB-15-2961, 2016 WL 192535, at *6 (D. Md., 2016); *see also* Md. Code, Educ. § 4-303(d) (“The board shall have the authority and be responsible for *all functions* relating to the Baltimore City Public School System....Notwithstanding any provision of local law...the board may adopt rules and regulations and prescribe policies and procedures for the management, maintenance, operation, and control of the Baltimore City Public School System.” (emphasis added)). Similarly, the Mayor and City Council cannot require employees in the Office of the

State's Attorney for Baltimore City to collaborate with City Schools or certain City agencies. Md. Const. art. V, § 9 ("The State's Attorney shall perform such duties and receive such salary as shall be prescribed by the General Assembly.").

While City Council lacks the authority to require a report from City Schools, City Schools may provide this report voluntarily and City Council may invite City School representatives to share their findings at a City Council hearing. The City Council has an inherent power to investigate "in furtherance of its legislative function." 4 McQuillin Mun. Corp. § 13:7. A resolution is an appropriate way for the City Council of Baltimore to conduct an informational hearing. *See, e.g., Inlet Assocs. v. Assateague House Condominium*, 313 Md. 413, 428 (1988). The City Council of Baltimore has the authority to require City agencies to collaborate with City Schools representatives to propose recommendations to address the root causes of unexcused absences found in the report. Section 2(a) of Article VII of the Baltimore City Charter allows for ordinances to give additional duties to "a department, officer, commission, board or other municipal agency" so long as those duties are "consistent with the Charter and subject to the supervision of a superior municipal officer or agency."

Additionally, there are both grammatical and substantive errors in Section 1(c) of the bill, notably verb tense consistency across the section as well as in the requirement that City Schools identify "a sample of schools to *perform data collection during the fall semester of 2024*...including implementing a data collection plan with sample schools", which is not feasible since Fall 2024 has already passed. City Council Bill 25-0002, Section 1(c)(2) (emphasis added)). If City Council Bill 25-0002 were amended to invite representatives from City Schools to prepare a report and share the findings with the City Council of Baltimore, the Law Department could approve this bill for legal form and sufficiency.

Sincerely,



Desiree Luckey
Assistant Solicitor

cc: Ebony Thompson, City Solicitor
Nina Themelis, Mayor's Office of Government Relations
Hilary Ruley, Chief Solicitor
Ashlea Brown, Chief Solicitor
Michelle Toth, Assistant Solicitor



CITY OF BALTIMORE
MAYOR BRANDON M. SCOTT

TO	The Honorable President and Members of the Baltimore City Council
FROM	Catalina Rodriguez Lima, Director, Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs
CC	Mayor's Office of Government Relations
DATE	2/13/2025
SUBJECT	BILL 25-0002 Study and Report – Absences in Baltimore City Schools

Position: Favorable

BILL SYNOPSIS

Council Bill 25-0002, introduced by Councilmember Conway, mandates the Baltimore City Public School System (“City Schools”) to prepare a comprehensive report exploring the causes of student absences. The goal is to identify solutions addressing the persistent barriers to attending school, involving collaboration with multiple city agencies.

SUMMARY OF POSITION

The Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MIMA) supports City Council Bill 25-0002 – Study and Report – Absences in Baltimore City. Absenteeism remains a significant barrier to educational success, particularly for immigrant and refugee students who face distinct challenges in accessing and staying engaged in school. This bill is a critical step in identifying and addressing systemic obstacles that disproportionately affect these students.

The bill's focus on developing a report with recommendations to improve attendance aligns with MIMA's mission to advance the well-being of immigrants, especially those who encounter challenges such as language barriers, cultural differences, and limited access to resources. MIMA looks forward to collaborating with the school system to support the report's development and implementation.

FISCAL IMPACT

MIMA works closely with the school system on issues impacting immigrant and refugee students and their families. If enacted, this bill will not impose any additional fiscal burden on MIMA beyond the allocation of staff time.

AMENDMENTS

MIMA strongly recommends that the study and report specifically address the experiences of immigrant and refugee youth. Contributing factors to absenteeism may include language barriers that prevent families from fully understanding attendance policies, school schedules, and

available support services. Additionally, many immigrant students balance school with work obligations—whether after or during school hours—to support their households. Others take on caregiving responsibilities, particularly in families where parents work multiple jobs with non-traditional hours. Lastly, fear of deportation and the removal of schools as a sensitive location for immigration enforcement have heightened anxiety among students and families, discouraging regular attendance.

For these reasons, the Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs supports City Council Bill 25-0002. MIMA stands ready to serve as a resource and provide technical assistance to Baltimore City Public Schools in advancing this effort.



CITY OF BALTIMORE
MAYOR BRANDON M. SCOTT

TO	The Honorable President and Members of the Baltimore City Council
FROM	Andrey Bundley, Director, Mayor's Office of African American Male Engagement
CC	Mayor's Office of Government Relations
DATE	January 23, 2025
SUBJECT	Council Bill 25-002 Study and Report - Absences in Baltimore City Schools

Position: Favorable

BILL SYNOPSIS

Baltimore City Public Schools will develop a report that delves into the root causes of student absences in order to more effectively identify solutions that will address the most persistent obstacles students encounter when attending school.

SUMMARY OF POSITION

We stand in support of BCPSS determine the underlying causes of student absences, including both excused and unexcused absences, to create policy recommendations that may be implemented to overcome the most persistent obstacles students encounter when attending school.

FISCAL IMPACT

AMENDMENTS



CITY OF BALTIMORE
MAYOR BRANDON M. SCOTT

TO	The Honorable President and Members of the Baltimore City Council
FROM	Dr. Debra Brooks, Executive Director, Mayor's Office of Children & Family Success
CC	Mayor's Office of Government Relations
DATE	February 13, 2025
SUBJECT	Council Bill 25-0002 – Study and Report: Absences in Baltimore City Schools

Position: Favorable

BILL SYNOPSIS

The bill requires the Baltimore City Public School System (BCPSS) to prepare a report exploring the causes of student absences to better identify and address the barriers to attendance. This bill also requires BCPSS to collaborate with city agencies to propose policy recommendations that address the root causes of unexcused absences.

SUMMARY OF POSITION

The Mayor's Office of Children & Family Success (MOCFS) regards this bill favorably. MOCFS frequently collaborates with Baltimore City Public Schools, the Baltimore Police Department, the Mayor's Office of Employment Development, the Mayor's Office of Homeless Services, the Mayor's Office of African American Engagement, the Office of the State's Attorney and other city and state agencies through existing programs and initiatives such as Intensive Case Management, Safe Passage, Child Fatality Review, YouthViolenceStat, and the Children's Cabinet. We are acutely aware that absenteeism is one of many important factors that dictate the future well-being of our children. As such, we deliver programs that help remove identified barriers to participation in school. We support any efforts by the Council and partner agencies to reduce chronic absenteeism among BCPSS students. We will actively participate in any convenings necessary and contribute to developing policy and programmatic recommendations as required by the bill.

MOCFS already offers several programs designed to reduce the barriers that children and their families may experience to school attendance. Baltimore's Community Action Partnership Centers (BCCAP) provide case management services and administer the Home Energy Assistance Program, Water4All Program, Security Deposit Assistance Program, and Eviction Prevention Programs, all designed to ensure families have adequate housing to support their student's ability to attend school. BCCAP Staff also regularly attend school and community-sponsored events, such as Back-to-School nights, to spread awareness about these programs and offer in-person application assistance. Further, MOCFS staff attends BCPSS annual attendance phone-a-thon,

where staff can directly hear and respond to issues families are experiencing that result in their students missing school.

Finally, MOCFS administers the Safe Passage program, which aims to increase attendance by supporting student safety near schools during entrance and dismissal times. Early information from Safe Passage sites indicates that this program may contribute to increased attendance at host schools.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no anticipated fiscal impact for the agency from this legislation.

AMENDMENTS

N/A



CITY OF BALTIMORE
MAYOR BRANDON M. SCOTT

TO	The Honorable President and Members of the Baltimore City Council
FROM	Ernestina Simmons, Executive Director, Mayor's Office of Homeless Services
CC	Mayor's Office of Government Relations
DATE	Thursday, February 13, 2025
SUBJECT	CB 25-0002 Study & Report – Absences in Baltimore City Schools

Position: Favorable

BILL SYNOPSIS

City Council Bill 25-0002 seeks to require Baltimore City Public Schools, or “City Schools,” to produce a report that examines and identifies the root causes of student absences in an effort to better identify solutions to address the barriers that students face. City Schools will also be required to collaborate with other city agencies including the Mayor's Office of Homeless Services to propose recommendations to address the causes of student absences both excused and unexcused.

SUMMARY OF POSITION

Upon review, the Mayor's Office of Homeless Services supports Council Bill 25-0002 and has determined that families with students enrolled in City Schools that are experiencing homelessness or housing instability may be a contributing factor to increases in school absences.

However, City Council should be aware that the Mayor's Office of Homeless Services deems individuals under age 18 as minors or children, which includes a majority of school-aged children. If the Mayor's Office of Homeless Services were to be called on to provide assistance to school-aged children experiencing homelessness in City Schools, then any services and resources recommended would be geared toward the entire family of that particular student or students.

FISCAL IMPACT

Based on the findings from the City Schools report, the Mayor's Office of Homeless Services may need to allocate funding to expand services that support the families of students including

temporary or transitional shelter, case management, employment assistance, mental health services, and addiction treatment and recovery support services.

AMENDMENTS

The Mayor's Office of Homeless Services does not request an amendment to the Bill.



CITY OF BALTIMORE
MAYOR BRANDON M. SCOTT

TO	The Honorable President and Members of the Baltimore City Council
FROM	Stefanie Mavronis, Director, Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement (MONSE)
DATE	February 24, 2025
SUBJECT	City Council Bill 25-0002 – Study and Report – Absences in Baltimore City Schools

The Honorable President and
Members of the City Council
City Hall, Room 400

February 24, 2025

Favorable

The Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement (MONSE) has reviewed Council Bill 25-0002, which requires the Baltimore City Public School System (BCPSS) to develop and submit to the City Council within 180 days a report providing detailed data and analysis on the root causes of student absences during School Year 2023-2024. The bill requires BCPSS, in developing the report, to collaborate with MONSE along with a number of other City agencies (the Baltimore Police Department, Mayor's Office of Children and Family Success, Mayor's Office of Employment Development, Mayor's Office of Homeless Services, Mayor's Office of African-American Male Engagement, and the Office of the State's Attorney for Baltimore City) to develop recommendations to stem chronic absenteeism.

MONSE recognizes the importance of addressing high rates of absenteeism in Baltimore City schools. The Biennial Update of Mayor Scott's Comprehensive Violence Prevention Plan (CVPP) includes, for the first time, a specific Youth Justice pillar focused on uplifting the safety of Baltimore's young people, investing in their future, and paving the way for their - and our City's - success. MONSE stands ready to support efforts to keep young people in class, including collaboration with BCPSS and other agencies to identify and implement solutions to the most persistent attendance barriers.

For this reason, we respectfully take a favorable position on City Council Bill 25-0002.

**EDUCATION, YOUTH AND
OLDER ADULT COMMITTEE**

PUBLIC TESTIMONY

SEE ATTACHED

Testimony of
The University of Baltimore School of Law's
Sayra and Neil Meyerhoff Center for Families, Children and the Courts (CFCC)
In Support of Council Bill 25-0002
Study and Report – Absences in Baltimore City Schools

TO: Chair John Bullock, Vice-Chair Mark Parker and Esteemed Members of the Education, Youth, and Older Adults Committee:
FROM: Aubrey Edwards-Luce, MSW, Esq., CFCC Executive Director

March 6, 2025

The Sayra and Neil Meyerhoff Center for Families, Children and the Courts (CFCC) at the University of Baltimore School of Law envisions communities where children and families thrive without unnecessary involvement in the legal system. We engage communities as we work towards transforming systems that create barriers to family well-being.

For nearly 20 years, CFCC has operated the Tackling Chronic Absenteeism Project (TCAP) (formerly called the Truancy Court Program),¹ an award-winning program that addresses the root causes of chronic absenteeism, re-engages families with schools, and disrupts the school-to-prison pipeline. CFCC has been addressing chronic absenteeism by providing a free (to schools and families), holistic, restorative, voluntary program for elementary, middle, and high school public school students in Baltimore City, Baltimore County, Anne Arundel County, and Montgomery County. After years of working across the region in all grade levels, TCAP has focused its efforts and developed a model specifically for middle school students in four Baltimore City Public Schools (City Schools) while serving the students' families in their communities.

¹ We applaud Council Bill 25-0002's use of the word "absence" in lieu of "truancy" because "truancy" implies that students are missing school due to their defiance or their negligence. Data we collected showed that for many of our TCAP students, the root causes of the absences had nothing to do with their defiance or failure to prepare. In 2023, we renamed our program to be the Tackling Chronic Absenteeism Project (TCAP) which is more indicative of the reparative, collaborative posture we take in our work with students and families. Additionally, as an organization committed to seeing students thrive, we could not focus exclusively on the unexcused absences that are encompassed in the definition of "truancy". (See, The People's Law Library of Maryland. "Truancy," available at <https://www.peoples-law.org/truancy>). Addressing unexcused absences did not adequately reflect the effort we put into educating parents and students about the harm that excused absences could do to their educational attainment. When it comes to learning, everyday matters—even the excused ones.

Each week TCAP staff and volunteers provide students with restorative circles, positive reinforcement, mentoring, tutoring, workshops, and individual check-ins to increase their attendance and decrease their risks of delinquency, drug use, and other behavioral issues. Our TCAP Case Manager, Attorney and Mentor provide caregivers and parents assistance with social services and benefits applications, understanding their child's educational needs and rights, legal services referrals, as well as short-term emergency housing support and food assistance. The TCAP has used a supportive and trauma-informed approach to give families wraparound services to improve attendance and promote academic success. As a long-standing direct service provider, we urge the Committee to join us in support of Council Bill 25-0002.

Chronic absenteeism is a national problem, and it remains an even more severe problem in Maryland and Baltimore City. Data from the 2023-2024 school year reveals the urgency of tackling chronic absenteeism: in Baltimore City Public Schools, the chronic absenteeism rate was 49%. This is in sharp contrast to the state's rate of 27%. More affluent districts such as Howard County had a rate of only 17%, while the rate at some of our schools was 70%. The lowest attendance rates are reported among students who belong to communities that frequently experience negative bias and marginalization—including Black and Hispanic students, students with disabilities, and economically disadvantaged students. For these youth, having frequent absences exacerbates the challenges they face. While the numbers look daunting, we are confident that the collaborative work we are doing with City Schools, the Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement (MONSE), Baltimore Polytechnic Institute, Araminta, and Fathers Fighting for Fathers Community Mentorship will facilitate the steady improvement in attendance rates for TCAP students.

CFCC enthusiastically supports increased focus on the issue of school attendance. We are only one of many service providers who are focused on the battle for school attendance in Baltimore, but I would venture to guess that many of our fellow providers see transportation, personal or family health issues, safety concerns and a lack of motivation as some of the most prominent reasons why students miss school. We support Council Bill 25-0002 because we hope it would allow the City Council to have a deeper and wider understanding of the root causes of excused and unexcused absences and lead to the identification of the type, scale, and location of resources needed to help families address the root causes. We also hope that the study required by the bill would afford TCAP an opportunity to share the wisdom we've gained during our nearly two decades of work.

CFCC agrees with the Mayor's Office on Immigrant Affairs that Council Bill 25-0002 should be amended to require that the report and study include the experience of immigrant youth. We have seen the way that federal immigration enforcement changes have negatively impacted the attendance rates at one of the schools TCAP operates in. Additionally, CFCC recommends that the study and report examine the relationship between student absence and both community violence and exclusionary discipline. These are themes that we see as we work with students to understand the root causes of their absences. We also recommend that the study and report use a gender-sensitive lens as it explores the qualitative and quantitative data. Finally, we are worried the deadline for the report will conflict with the shift in capacity that City Schools experience once summer break begins. Therefore, we recommend that Council Bill 25-0002 be amended to either: (1) provide a full year for the report; or (2) provide City Schools with additional resources

so that it can appropriately increase its capacity and complete the report pursuant to the current timeline.

Seven years ago, pursuant to HB 429 The Morgan State University published the report “Winning Strategies on the War against Habitual Student Truancy” which is full of recommendations to address school truancy across Maryland. Much has changed since the publication of this report and updates are undoubtedly necessary. However, we encourage the Council and City Schools to review this rich resource as they work to turn the tide on school absences.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. CFCC stands ready to support the execution of this bill’s intent and we urge the committee to support Council Bill 25-0002.

If you have any questions, please feel free to email me at AEwardsLuce@ubalt.edu.

Councilman Conway, Sponsors of 25-002, and Members of the Education and Youth Committee:

I am pleased to submit written testimony on 25-002, Study and Report – Absences in Baltimore City Schools.

Friendly Amendment

First, I would propose a friendly amendment to the text of the legislation. In developing the report on the root causes of absenteeism and chronic absenteeism, the bill would require Baltimore City Public Schools (BCPSS) to collaborate with the “Baltimore Police Department, Mayor’s Office of Children and Family Success, Mayor’s Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement, Mayor’s Office of Employment Development, Mayor’s Office of Homeless Services, Mayor’s Office of African-American Male Engagement, and the Office of the State’s Attorney for Baltimore City.” Missing from the list of required collaborators is the Baltimore City Health Department (BCHD) and the Mayor’s Office for Immigrant Affairs (MOIA).

On the former: BCHD has an Office of School Health that is responsible for providing traditional school health services and coordinating the provision of expanded school health services such as school-based health centers. Such services are critical to understanding absenteeism, and to mitigating it. Baltimore’s children are disproportionately burdened by chronic diseases and conditions such as asthma,¹ exposure to lead (which is associated with developmental delays), depression, substance use disorder, and pregnancy.² Our city has environmental pollutants such as high counts of particulate matter, particularly in South Baltimore, that exacerbate the symptoms of children and their caregivers. Managing absenteeism is also about managing the physical condition of our young residents, a task that will be made more difficult by the failure to include BCHD as a formal partner in this bill.

On the latter: With the change in the federal administration, families are fearful. Understanding the unique needs of Baltimore’s immigrant, undocumented, and mixed status families will be critical to ensuring these groups feel safe and secure in sending their children to school regularly. Involving MOIA is necessary if the City Council wishes to have a complete and clear-eyed set of data from which to draw conclusions about the root causes of absenteeism. Finally, the presence of MOIA may ally fears given that many of the other agencies listed as formal partners have an explicit carceral or punitive focus.³

BCPSS Policy and Absenteeism

The bill would require BCPSS to, 180 days following enactment, produce an analysis of absenteeism that examines the root causes of absenteeism, including but not limited to: the economic class of students, parental involvement, transportation, type of school, and location of school and the students’ homes.

¹ <https://abell.org/publication/pediatric-asthma/>

² <https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/health-data/maryland/baltimore-city?year=2024>

³ Curiously, you include the SAO but exclude the Office of the Public Defender. I would urge you to consider including representatives from OPD’s juvenile division to as to ensure a balanced and nuanced conversation about juvenile offending and its relationship to absenteeism.

I appreciate the Council's inclusion of these factors but wish to draw your attention to another: policies of the district's own making.

Policy JFBA, School Choice,⁴ establishes a policy unlike many other jurisdictions in the state though common to majority Black, urban, historically underfunded and politically visible districts. This policy permits middle schoolers and requires high schoolers to select a school to attend. Ostensibly, such a policy breaks the link between where a student lives and where they must attend school. On its face, such a policy is about merit; that is, students who have worked hard in elementary and middle school and attained high grades and test scores are able to attend any school of their choosing. In a city as racially and economically segregated as Baltimore, such a policy is welcome development for many families who cannot afford to buy, rent, or lease a home in neighborhoods in close proximity to the most desirable schools Roland Park Elementary/Middle, Mount Royal Elementary/Middle, Hampstead Hill Elementary/Middle, Baltimore Polytechnic, City College, Dunbar, and Western.

Unfortunately, practice eats policy – even the most well-intentioned and thoughtful policy – for lunch. And it is precisely that practice of the choice policy that is so inextricably linked to the root causes of absenteeism.

While BCPSS offers a choice of schools for middle and high school students, that choice is constrained or illusory for many based on the following:

- (1) Transportation. Although BCPSS tells students they may attend any school to which they are accepted, they do not provide transportation. Indeed, the School Choice Guide did not even include the nearest bus line(s) for each middle and high school until the Parent and Community Advisory Board (PCAB, to which I belonged from 2020-2023) pushed them to do so. While 25-002 will consider the method by which students reach school, the practical experience of young people detailed in the Fund for Educational Excellence reports, reporting by the *Baltimore Banner* and WYPR, and the *Baltimore Beat* demonstrate the very challenging conditions under which young people are forced to reach their preferred school, including commutes that exceed 90 minutes each way; waits at unsheltered, unlit, un-shoveled bus stops; unsafe conditions on the bus, light rail, and metro; delayed and cancelled buses; long outages of major transit lines like the light rail; and more.

(I will note that I am also the parent of an 11th grader who attended Roland Park Elementary/Middle to participate in Advanced Academic and now attends Baltimore School for the Arts. My child has taken transit daily since 6th grade, beginning at age 11. They have been stranded on early release days (the 95 to Roland Park only runs during rush hours), been denied boarding because the bus was deemed too full for all the students waiting so none were allowed to board, witnessed the assault of a bus driver by a patron, witnessed several fights between riders on the bus or at stops, been sexually harassed by riders including one who tried to show them pornography on their phone, and waited in excess of 30 minutes on routes that are supposed to run every 10-15.)

⁴ <https://go.boarddocs.com/mabe/bcpss/Board.nsf/goto?open&id=AD5KKN515F25>

- (2) School closures. BCPSS has closed dozens of schools since 2013. See

https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=1oOQ0ejx9ax_XEMOoNWC6gUV2hwf8V40&usp=s_haring These closures force students and families to travel further from their home to attend *any*



school. The school system has already acknowledged that an increase in transit time affects attendance: **“Every additional 10-minute increase in commute time has a negative impact on our students that lead to absenteeism or them transferring to other schools, just because they just don't have a good route to school.”** That’s what the COO of BCPSS told WYPR in 2020 and it remains true today.⁵

- (3) Zoning. BCPSS has not comprehensively rezoned schools in more than two decades. In 2015, BCPSS contacted with DeJong Richter to look at patterns of attendance – data probably important to this bill – including how students and families chose schools.⁶ Their

analysis noted only 57% of children were attending their home-zoned school. The other 43% were almost evenly split between those attending charters (which, with few exceptions, are lottery-based enrollment) and those attending a *different* zoned school (for example, you are zoned for Barclay Elementary/Middle but send your child to Margaret Brent Elementary/Middle). The final report from the contractors found **“Over time, Baltimore City demographics and housing options have changed across neighborhoods. Therefore, current zones may not necessarily reflect current residential patterns and student residence locations.”** And that remains true today. Families are hungry for high-quality options and as such they commit themselves and their children to long commutes, often on transit that is neither reliable nor an appropriate substitute for the yellow bus, just for a chance to attend a school that offers honors or other desirable programming. Why the clamor for a small subset of these schools, even knowing that your 11-year-old will endure a long, cold commute? Because doing otherwise drastically and dramatically affects the trajectory of young people.

- (4) Composite scores and choice. Although the choice process appears to be a meritocracy, it is not, or not wholly so. Students who perform well in elementary (that is, high grades and standardized test scores with national studies⁷ noting that standardized test scores are a proxy for familial

⁵ <https://www.wypr.org/wypr-news/2020-09-10/proposed-baltimore-bus-route-cuts-are-impactful-state-transit-head-says>

⁶ https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1Ov8643itjCYEpu_Bbs_-RN-30I-V3-XZ

⁷ See, e.g., <https://www.mdpi.com/2227-7102/14/2/129>; <https://budgetmodel.wharton.upenn.edu/issues/2021/9/28/is-income-implicit-in-measures-of-student-ability>; <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10923574/>

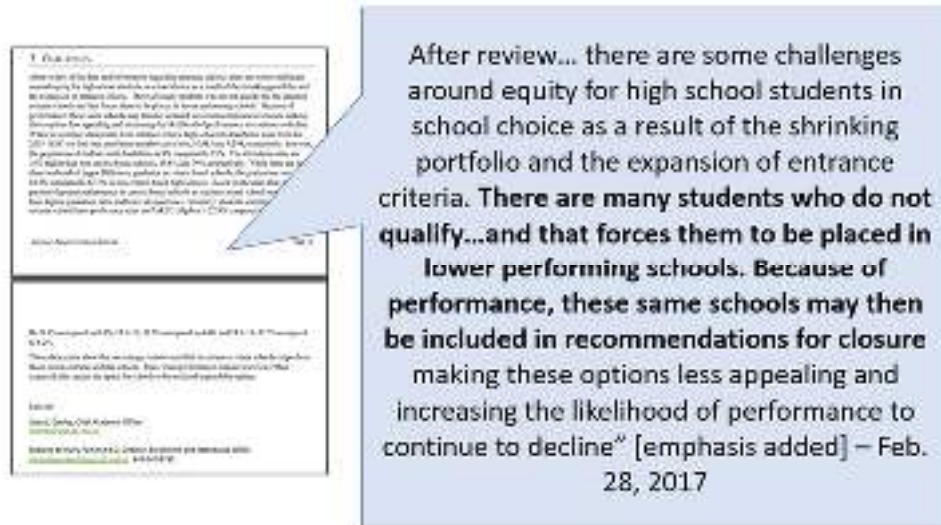
income) have higher composite scores that permit them to attend specialized programming such as Advanced Academics. Although the Ingenuity Program is not operated by BCPSS, it conveys an advantage in middle school, as do honors or International Baccalaureate programming. These magnet programs – they operate only at a small number of schools and draw students from across the city – convey a significant advantage in the high school applications process. Grades in these programs are favorably weighted (that is, a student who earns an A in a standard class achieves a 4.0 but a student in a selective magnet program who earns an A achieves a 4.5 or 5.0). Honors programming also conveys a GPA advantage but such programming is not available in every middle school. Even schools with honors programming may have only a single class or two, with limited seats. *This means that many, many students are forced to leave their home neighborhood and travel – and remember, the COO told folks that every extra 10 minutes of commute is associated with falling attendance – to access the highest quality programming.*

The gulf in scores between schools that offer this programming and those that do not or do so only in limited fashion is *enormous.* I requested data on the scores of middle schoolers (25th, 50th, and 75th percentile) last year. Children are not dumb. They can articulate and intuit whether their schooling experience is worthwhile, whether they are being directed toward success and graduation and career or not. **I would encourage this Council to ask why BCPSS allows the following without serious and sustained intervention. If you want a copy of the data, email me or ask Councilman Blanchard, as I already shared it with him.**

Top Performing Schools	75 th Percentile Score	Absenteeism rate % ⁸	Lowest Performing Schools	75 th Percentile Score	Absenteeism Rate %
Patterson Park Charter	776	3.11	Sandtown-Winchester Achievement Academy	503	28.43
Mount Washington	779	5.48	Booker T. Washington	522	28.53
Roland Park	788	3.02	Katherine Johnson	524	35.08
Thomas Johnson	800	5.21	Stadium School	524	21.08
Hampstead Hill	820	0.93	Windsor Hills	530	30.94

⁸ <https://marylandpublicschools.org/about/Documents/DCAA/SSP/20232024Student/2024-Habitual-Truants-Publication-A.pdf>

And if you think the connection between achievement and absenteeism is spurious, I direct you to the former CAO of BCPSS:⁹



In an equitable and well-functioning district whether a student had access to these programs may not be as critical as it is in Baltimore. Although BCPSS' portfolio includes about 30 high schools, the educational experience at the selective schools (City, Dunbar, Poly, Western) and schools that control their entry (Bard, which requires a visit or virtual information session, interview, and essay; Baltimore School for the Arts, which requires an audition and for some disciplines a portfolio; Baltimore Design School, which requires a portfolio submission) is wildly different than the experience in other buildings. Some high schools offer multiple AP classes or IB, field trips, dozens of clubs or affiliate groups, a newspaper, robust student government, etc. and others do not. More importantly, the four- and five-year graduation rates vary *wildly* between schools. If you have a young person and want to ensure they graduate in four or five years, the "choice" of schools shrinks from nearly 30 high schools *to just 8 schools, two of which only serve female students* (schools with a 90% rate or better: City, Design School, BLSYW, Poly, BSA, Bard, Western, Green Street – think about the geographic distribution and ease of transit to those schools).

(If you have not toured high schools in the city recently, I encourage you to do and to ask questions about the offerings for young people, and to observe the conditions under which they are expected to learn. I'd strongly encourage this tour to begin by riding transit alongside a young person, ideally several times and in inclement weather to understand why many are tardy or absent.)

- (5) Scarcity and competition. Students and families know if their education is of quality. When they attend a school where one in three, four, or five students is chronically absent, they know the education they receive suffers. Teachers cannot meaningfully deliver instruction to a classroom where they are expected either to repeat lessons for students who are missing substantial portions

⁹ <https://go.boarddocs.com/mabe/bcpss/Board.nsf/goto?open=&id=AJTV5377ABDE>

of the material or plow ahead and leave those students behind. It is untenable to tutor or enrich or summer school our way out of a system in which some buildings are literally half empty. Students look around and see empty seats, disengaged learners, and a “choice” system that has segregated them away with other young people who, for a myriad of reasons, did not do well enough in middle to attend a better high school. I ask you: if you were facing a cold, long, unsheltered, unsafe commute to such a school, would you feel strongly that your personal attendance mattered? That this building and these teachers and this system cared about your success?

I would argue – strongly argue – that we understand the root causes of absenteeism already. We don’t need to take six months and make agencies sit at a table together to produce data about why so many young people aren’t making it to school. Instead, I would urge this Council to look at what we already know, what we’ve already paid for (nearly half a million on rezoning and demand analysis already), and what the evidentiary based already tells us about successful interventions. Wasting six months to have a branded document that will join the other branded documents on the shelves of policy nerds like me is not

a good use of time or money. I implore you: action over studies. What action? I’d suggest taking the Mayor up on his 2020 promise¹⁰ to the American Federation of Teachers in which he promised he’d direct the City Planning Department would work with BCPSS to redraw boundaries, ideally with an eye toward equity and reducing some of the transportation pressures that are so linked to absenteeism.

Sincerely,

Melissa Schober
District 14, 202-494-7881

13. In Baltimore, as across the nation, school zones and neighborhood boundaries have historically served to limit access to high quality public schools. While Baltimore City Public Schools students in middle and high school are assigned to schools through a complicated “school choice” process, students in elementary schools are still largely assigned to schools based on enrollment zones. These zones were created over a generation ago, and in the years since, population shifts (notably large growth southeast Baltimore of the English Language Learner population, which required additional services and support) have resulted in several schools being overcrowded, while others are under-enrolled. Additionally, the school district’s Equity Policy requires it to examine its plans and practices to determine and address the ways they exacerbate racial and economic inequity. In order to meet the needs of Baltimore families, and move towards a more just and equitable school system, a comprehensive redistricting plan should be completed, involving the coordination of the Baltimore City Planning Department and Baltimore City Public Schools. However, changing neighborhood boundaries causes significant public backlash. If elected, would you support school redistricting and would you direct the Baltimore City Planning Department to partner with City Schools to create a comprehensive plan?

Yes. As Mayor, I will approach all issues from a framework of equity and look to redress inequities where they exist. This includes our school boundaries. I will direct the City Department of Planning to work with City Schools to revise the boundaries based on the results of the 2020 Census. If our school districts do not accurately reflect our population, it’s impossible to allocate our precious resources effectively and justly. I will use whatever means are at my disposal to pursue a policy of school integration. Just last month I was on a panel discussing a book that demonstrates the efficacy of school integration as a means-tested policy to close the achievement gap.

It is my hope that such a push may help alleviate the disinvestment discussed in the previous question. A model for this approach may be a law that I advocated for and passed the last legislative session: the legislation requires that the Baltimore City Police Department redraw its district boundaries based on population, calls for service, and other relevant metrics. I will also work with BCPSS to encourage them to adhere to my equity assessment legislation so that the school district continuously evaluates all policy and program decisions through an equity lens. The entire process of school redistricting must be rooted in strong community engagement. This is critical because caregivers and students will have an opportunity to meaningfully participate in the process, thus ensuring a smoother transition for affected families.

¹⁰ https://md.aft.org/sites/default/files/article_pdf_files/2020-02/mayorscott2020.pdf

CITY OF BALTIMORE
COUNCIL BILL 25-0002
(First Reader)

Introduced by: Councilmember Conway

Cosponsored by: Councilmembers Parker, Dorsey, Middleton, Torrence, Gray, Bullock, Porter,
Blanchard, Jones, Glover, Ramos, and President Cohen

Introduced and read first time: January 13, 2025

Assigned to: Education, Youth, and Older Adults Committee

REFERRED TO THE FOLLOWING AGENCIES: City Solicitor, Baltimore City Public Schools, Police
Department, Mayor's Office of Children and Family Success, Mayor's Office of Neighborhood
Safety and Engagement, Mayor's Office of Employment Development, Mayor's Office of
Homeless Services, Mayor's Office of African-American Male Engagement, Office of the State's
Attorney for Baltimore City

A RESOLUTION ENTITLED

1 A RESOLUTION OF THE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL concerning

2 **Study and Report – Absences in Baltimore City Schools**

3 FOR the purpose of requiring the Baltimore City Public School System ("City Schools") to
4 prepare a report exploring the causes of student absences to better identify solutions to
5 address the most persistent barriers students face to attending school; requiring City Schools
6 to collaborate with certain City agencies to propose recommendations to address the root
7 causes of unexcused absences found in the report; and providing for a special effective date.

8 **Recitals**

9 **SECTION 1. BE IT RESOLVED BY THE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL OF BALTIMORE, That:**

- 10 (a) The City Council would like to determine the root causes of student absences, both
11 excused and unexcused, so as to develop policy recommendations that agencies can
12 implement to address the most persistent barriers students face to attending school.
- 13 (b) No later than 180 days after enactment of the Resolution, City Schools shall develop
14 and submit to the City Council a report providing detailed data and analysis on school
15 absences during School Year 2023-2024 ("SY23-24") exploring the root causes of
16 student absences both excused and unexcused, including:
- 17 (1) reasons for absences;
- 18 (2) date of absences;
- 19 (3) economic class of absent students;
- 20 (4) parent involvement in absent students' education;
- 21 (5) sibling involvement in absent students' education;
- 22 (6) typical type of transportation to school of absent students;

EXPLANATION: CAPITALS indicate matter added to existing law.
[Brackets] indicate matter deleted from existing law.

Council Bill 25-0002

(7) type of school, such as charter, private, or public;

(8) location of school and absent students' homes; and

(9) any other data City Schools finds relevant to developing a full analysis of the causes of absenteeism.

(c) The report shall further Baltimore City Schools' efforts to stem chronic absenteeism by:

(1) examining SY23-24 attendance data to understand the demographic, economic, and geographic distribution of absenteeism and determine patterns in excused and unexcused absences;

(2) identifying a sample of schools to perform data collection during the fall semester of 2024 based on the analysis of SY23-24 administrative data, including implementing a data collection plan with sample schools:

(3) meet with school attendance staff to assess and define challenges to addressing chronic absenteeism;

(4) attempt to make contact with families and students to gather information about the reasons for student absence;

(5) deploying a mixed method design to Fall 2024 data across a sample of schools to understand the most persistent root causes contributing to absences; and

(6) collecting qualitative data from school attendance leads, adults who have a relationship with chronically absent students, and families.

(d) When developing the report, City Schools will collaborate with the Baltimore Police Department, Mayor's Office of Children and Family Success, Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement, Mayor's Office of Employment Development, Mayor's Office of Homeless Services, Mayor's Office of African-American Male Engagement, and the Office of the State's Attorney for Baltimore City to analyze the collected data and develop innovative solutions for how these agencies can support efforts to address the root causes of unexcused absences.

(e) City Schools shall present the report at a City Council hearing.

SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ORDAINED, That this Ordinance takes effect on the date it is enacted.