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**Testimony in SUPPORT of HB 425:
Public Schools – Suspensions and Expulsions**

TO: Chair Kaiser, and Members of the House Ways and Means Committee
FROM: Jonathon Rondeau, President & CEO, Family League of Baltimore
DATE: February 14, 2017

As Baltimore’s Local Management Board, Family League serves as an architect of change in Baltimore by promoting data-driven, collaborative initiatives and aligning resources to create lasting outcomes for children, families and communities. Our mission is that by 2030, all children in Baltimore will be born healthy, succeed in school, graduate high school and transition into higher education and the workforce. One of the ways we do this is by convening the Baltimore City School Climate Collaborative, a broad coalition working to create an environment where students feel safe, supported, and respected, attend regularly, and participate in the learning process.

We support the elimination of suspensions and expulsions for prekindergarten students, and are in support of House Bill 425. The US Department of Education, in addressing the need for positive school climate, indicated that schools should develop clear, appropriate, and consistent expectations and consequences to address disruptive student behaviors.¹ This is in line with the recommendations for restorative practices and building, “a sense of belonging, safety, and social responsibility in the school community,” as outlined in HB 425.

Data shows that suspensions and expulsions in preschool settings are associated with negative educational and life outcomes.²³ Pre-K suspensions disproportionately occur along race and gender lines, with boys of color being suspended and expelled at much higher rates than their peers.⁴⁵⁶ Additionally, students with disabilities are impacted at higher rates than students without disabilities; studies show that although students who receive special education services

¹ US Department of Education. (2014). Guiding Principles: A resource guide for improving school climate and discipline. <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/guiding-principles.pdf>

² Lamont, J. H., Devore, C. D., Allison, M., Ancona, R., Barnett, S. E., Gunther, R., & Young, T. (2013). Out-of-school suspension and expulsion. *Pediatrics*, 131(3), e1000-e1007.

³ Petras, H., Masyn, K. E., Buckley, J. A., Ialongo, N. S., & Kellam, S. (2011). Who is most at risk for school removal? A multilevel discrete time survival analysis of individual and context-level influences. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 103, 223.

⁴ Gilliam, W. S. (2005). *Prekindergartners left behind: Expulsion rates in state prekindergarten systems*. New York, NY: Foundation for Child Development.

⁵ U.S Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (2014). *Data Snapshot: Early Childhood Education*.

⁶ Gilliam, W.S., & Shahar, G. (2006). Preschool and child care expulsion and suspension: Rates and predictors in one state. *Infants & Young Children*, 19, 228–245.

represent 12 percent of students in the country, they make up 19 percent of students suspended in school.⁷

Punitive practices like suspensions and expulsions do not adequately weigh the psychosocial or environmental factors at play in the lives of Baltimore’s children. In Baltimore and across Maryland, there have been nearly 5,000 new cases of lead poisoning in the last decade alone⁸, a diagnosis that has been shown to have negative impacts on classroom behavior.⁹ Additionally, one in three Baltimore City children live in food deserts,¹⁰ areas where nutritional food is not readily accessible. By replacing suspensions and expulsions for 3- and 4-year-old students with restorative practices, school staff can help create positive learning environments that may better mitigate problem behavior symptomatic of environmental factors.

This legislation aligns with our role as a lead facilitating partner for the Community Schools strategy in Baltimore, and with our work facilitating the Baltimore City School Climate Collaborative. **Family League of Baltimore respectfully requests a favorable report on House Bill 425.** If you have any questions, I can be reached at jrondeau@familyleague.org or 420-662-5500.

Sincerely,

Jonathon Rondeau
President & CEO
Family League of Baltimore

⁷ US Department of Education. (2014). Guiding Principles: A resource guide for improving school climate and discipline. <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/guiding-principles.pdf>

⁸ Broadwater, L., & Wheeler, T. (Dec. 5, 2015). Lead paint: Despite progress, hundreds of Maryland children still poisoned. Baltimore Sun.

⁹ Liu J, Liu X, Wang W, McCauley L, Pinto-Martin J, Wang Y, Li L, Yan C, Rogan WJ. (2014). Blood lead levels and children’s behavioral and emotional problems: a cohort study. JAMA Pediatrics. doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2014.332.

¹⁰ Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future (2015). “Mapping Baltimore City’s Food Environment: 2015 Report.”