



Testimony Concerning HB 185
“Nonpublic Schools and Child Care Providers - Corporal Punishment - Prohibition”
Submitted to the House Ways & Means Committee
February 1, 2023

Position: Favorable

Maryland Family Network (MFN) supports HB 185, which would prohibit corporal punishment in nonpublic schools and child care programs. Corporal punishment is a violent and discredited practice that can do great harm with no redeeming benefit, and it should be consistently prohibited across all education settings in Maryland.

As Maryland's largest and oldest statewide child advocacy organization, MFN is strongly committed to a process that identifies and addresses factors affecting the well-being of children and youth, including the prevention of child abuse and neglect.

Child development and medical experts such as the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Medical Association, the American Psychological Association, and the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) have for decades opposed the practice of corporal punishment and supported legislative efforts to ban it.

In a statement first enunciated in 1988 and re-issued several times since, AACAP notes “In corporal punishment, the adult usually hits various parts of the child's body with a hand, or with canes, paddles, yardsticks, belts, or other objects expected to cause pain and fear.... Punishment has been found to occur more frequently with students who are male, poor, and ethnic minority.... Corporal punishment signals to the child that a way to settle interpersonal conflicts is to use physical force and inflict pain. Such children may in turn resort to such behavior themselves.... Supervising adults who willfully humiliate children and punish by force and pain are often causing more harm than they prevent.”

In 2016, a landmark analysis of dozens of prior studies (E.T. Gershoff & A. Grogan-Kaylor, *Journal of Family Psychology*, 2016) found no positive outcomes and a variety of negative outcomes strongly associated with corporal punishment. That same year, the U.S. Secretary of Education cited the findings and urged states to end corporal punishment in schools. And in 2021, new research on the neural effects of corporal punishment emerged from Harvard University. In the words of lead researcher Jorge Cuartas, “We know that spanking is not effective and can be harmful for children's development and increases the chance of mental health issues. With these new findings, we also know it can have potential impact on brain development, changing biology, and leading to lasting consequences.”

Many other nonviolent disciplinary methods are far more effective in promoting self-control and encouraging appropriate behaviors in children. MFN respectfully urges the Committee's favorable consideration of HB 185.