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PROJECT SAVE CHILDHOOD
PRESS RELEASE

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Project Save Childhood applauds Virginia Governor Terry McAuliffe as he signs into law historic legislation that creates a new legal defense for children with special needs. Passed with overwhelming bipartisan support, [Virginia House Bill 1213](#) permits defendants to introduce school records, such as behavior plans, in juvenile court as evidence that they lacked willfulness or intent. Secretary of Public Safety Brian Moran called the bill “an important step forward in a much needed comprehensive effort to divert kids in need of services, as opposed to incarcerating them.”

Juliet Hiznay, a special education attorney and founder of [Project Save Childhood](#) who worked on the bill with Delegate Albo, praised the effort stating, “Governor McAuliffe and Delegate Albo deserve our deepest thanks for their commitment to the disability community. Parents are terrified their children will be prosecuted, and rightfully so. Students with 504 plans and special education services are being charged for behaviors that are meant to be addressed through services and accommodations. HB 1213 will provide judges with a legal basis to dismiss cases when kids have diminished capacity.”

[Virginia was recently exposed as number 1 in the nation for school referrals of students to the criminal justice system, at nearly 3 times the national average.](#) HB 1213 applies only to school-based misdemeanors and addresses only those situations where a disabled student has been charged. “Child advocates have momentum, but broader school and criminal law reforms are needed to help children learn in school instead of forcing them into the school to prison pipeline,” stated Angela Ciolfi, Legal Director of Just Children, a Program of the Legal Aid Justice Center.

*Project Save Childhood is a grass roots advocacy effort to improve school climate in Virginia.
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