



If *and when* this database is misused as we have seen in other states, we could be creating a digital record that follows students for years, impacting their educational opportunities and potentially criminalizing them, with no option for recourse, revision, or restoration.

Additionally, I am deeply concerned about the surveillance aspect of this bill. Schools should not be militarized spaces.

We must ask: Who controls this database? How long does a student stay on it? Who has access to this sensitive information?

SB 54 claims to offer mental health services to flagged students, but let's be honest, Georgia's schools are already severely underfunded when it comes to mental health support. Instead of putting students on a watchlist, we should be investing in counselors, social workers and restorative justice practices that address behavioral concerns at the root, rather than punishing students after the fact. It is time to shift from a trauma informed after-care to healing centered engagement.

This legislation moves us toward data collection and tracking of children in ways that raise serious privacy concerns. When we start keeping digital records of perceived "threats," we create a system of pre-criminalization, where students – especially Black, Latino and disabled students – are branded as threats before they have even had a fair chance. The information in this database could follow them through their entire education journey, making it harder for them to get second chances and even impacting future opportunities. We must be careful not to turn schools into places of surveillance and policing rather than learning and growth.

If we truly want to create safe schools, then we must stop treating students like suspects and start investing in what actually works: mental health professionals, restorative justice practices, trauma-informed interventions, and adequate funding for school counselors and social workers. Safety does not come from tracking, policing or creating digital records of student behavior. It comes from creating environments where students feel seen, supported and valued.

We must ask: Will this bill make our schools safer, or will it create more pathways for students – especially Black and Latino students – to be funneled into the juvenile justice system? We cannot afford to pass policies that, however well-intended, reinforce systemic inequities.

I urge this committee to vote against Senate Bill 54 and instead pursue policies that prioritize student well-being, educational equity, and privacy over punitive surveillance. I also urge this committee to involve actual students and parents in the decision-making process.

IDRA is available for any questions or further resources that we can provide. Thank you for your consideration. For more information, please contact Mikayla Arciaga, M.A.Ed., Georgia Advocacy Director, at [mikayla.arciaga@idra.org](mailto:mikayla.arciaga@idra.org).

*IDRA is an independent, non-profit organization led by Celina Moreno, J.D. Our mission is to achieve equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college.*