

MABE's Advocacy Toolkit

A Guide to Successful Education Advocacy in Maryland

MABE Maryland Association of Boards of Education
Serving & Supporting Boards of Education Since 1957

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MABE's Mission

"The mission of the Maryland Association of Boards of Education is to support local boards in fulfilling their multiple roles through professional development, advocacy, and member services."

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MABE's Advocacy Mission

The goal of MABE's governmental relations program is to serve our members by being advocates for public schools, for local board governance of education, and for the continued leadership and legal authority of school boards.

MABE Maryland Association of Boards of Education

Advocacy at the State Level

MABE strives to be the primary voice for public education in Annapolis. The unity of 24 local school boards lends strength to our increasing importance in the legislative process, ensuring that the Governor and General Assembly turn to MABE to help determine what is best for school children.

MABE's Role in Annapolis

Overall, approximately 350 of the 2500 bills introduced each year pertain to public elementary and secondary education.

Of the 350 education-related bills, MABE typically submits written testimony on 60 to 80 bills and provides oral testimony on 30 to 40 of those.

We're in it for the kids!

Our more than 850,000 public school students deserve an outstanding education, provided by highly qualified and effective teachers in safe, healthy learning environments – and effective advocates fighting for the policies and resources necessary to make this possible.

Local board members must be leaders among these advocates.

The Advocacy Toolkit

This Advocacy Toolkit is intended to complement board and board member advocacy efforts by providing a portable guide to assist in lobbying local, state and federal officials on behalf of Maryland's outstanding public schools and students.

A Comprehensive Toolkit

- I. Becoming an advocate
 - Informed on the issues
 - Knowing the policy makers
 - Using what you know with who you know = Advocacy
- II. Advocacy tools
- III. Advocacy at the local level
- IV. Advocacy at the state level
- V. Advocacy at the federal level

Being an Informed Advocate

"Lobbying" is defined as an organized attempt to influence decision-makers on a particular issue.

Therefore, a critical first step in effective advocacy is "getting organized" by becoming more informed about both the policy issues and the policy-making process.

The "Advocacy Challenge"

Learn how to become an informed advocate without being overwhelmed and/or too intimidated by what you *don't* know to act on what you *do*.

Using the *Toolkit* and other MABE resources should help you manage the risks and reap the rewards of effective advocacy.

A note on keeping "In Role"

Always be sure that your advocacy efforts conform to your local board's positions, policies and protocols.

MABE Resources

On most issues, you should have the benefit of testimony, talking points, and other information prepared by MABE.

- ✓ Stay current with MABE
- ✓ Insist that MABE stay current
- ✓ Use, critique, and help improve MABE's materials

MABE In-House Publications

MABE provides several electronic publications to keep members informed:

- *The E-Brief*: an electronic newsletter contains association and member news, news from the state and federal levels, and links of interest to education leaders.
- *The GreenSheet*: a legislative report provided regularly during the General Assembly's legislative session.
- *The Monitor*: a summary of the Maryland State Board of Education's monthly meeting.

MABE Advocacy Resources

The Advocacy section of MABE's website (www.mabe.org) has a wealth of information pertaining to the General Assembly, Maryland State Board of Education, and federal issues:

- ✓ Legislative Positions & Priorities
- ✓ Priority Issues & Updates
- ✓ Bill testimony and correspondence
- ✓ GreenSheet alerts and Calls to Action
- ✓ Legislative session summaries
- ✓ Presentations on priority issues

GreenSheets

- MABE's Legislative Newsletter
- Updates on priority issues
- Reminders & details about Legislative Day
- Calls to Action including:
 - Talking Points
 - Sample letters
 - Direct email links and phone numbers

Advocacy During Session

- Members of the General Assembly
- Delegations
- House & Senate Leadership
- Committees & Subcommittees
- Members' & Committee Staff
- The Governor, State Superintendent, and Staff

General Assembly Resources

The Maryland General Assembly's website (<http://mgaleg.maryland.gov>) is an excellent resource for session information, legislator contact information, House and Senate agendas and procedures, hearing schedules, and information on bill status.

The General Assembly

- 141 Delegates, 47 Senators
- 90-day regular legislative sessions (Jan. – April)
- The House Speaker and Senate President assign all committee chairs and vice-chairs
- Committee Chairs name subcommittee chairs, schedule bill hearings and votes
- Committee hearings, but not voting sessions, are printed in the hearing schedule
- All bills get a hearing, but not necessarily a vote

How a Bill Becomes a Law

At the request of legislators, bills are drafted by the Department of Legislative Services (DLS).

A bill must be confined to a single subject (the "one subject rule").

First Reading consists of the clerk reading the bill title and assignment to committee.

Committees hold hearings and may vote favorable, favorable with amendments, unfavorable, or not at all.

Four Committees in Focus

House:

- Ways and Means (policy)
- Appropriations (budget & policy)

Senate:

- Education, Health, and Environment (policy)
- Budget & Taxation (budget & policy)

Talking to the Votes

Board members are influence leaders who have the capacity to be effective advocates.

What tools are available to craft the advocacy message?

- MABE testimony
- MABE's Legislative Positions publication
- MABE materials: talking points, slides, etc.
- Bill and Fiscal Note (if available)

Tips for Effective Advocacy

- Keep it simple – most issues can be explained, and a position stated, in only a few sentences
- Use the tool that works for you – call, write a letter, email, or schedule a meeting
- Speak up to be heard on key public education issues – actions and inactions count
- Set priorities – when everything is important, nothing is important
- Be direct – make specific requests for specific positions and actions

Tips for Effective Advocacy

- Keep it local – highlight the pros or cons of legislation on the local school system
- Be a team player – be sure that your advocacy efforts conform to your local board's policies and protocols
- Join forces – remind legislators of any association, coalition, or other stakeholder support for your position
- Be an educator – invite elected officials to visit local schools to showcase successful programs
- State the positive – be enthusiastic & courteous

Tips for Effective Advocacy

- Say thank you – remember to thank each of the elected officials for their time and their position or action on issues where there is agreement
- Follow up – be sure to provide any information offered or requested
- Share your experience – your fellow board members, boards, MABE, and our allies can benefit from what you've learned
- Relax! Effective advocates do not need to be polished, professional lobbyists

Contacting Elected Officials

Regularly contacting legislators and developing a relationship with them assists them in making well-informed decisions regarding education

Ideally, legislators will reciprocate by seeking your input as issues are being considered

Make a Phone Call

Phone calls are an effective and fast way to communicate with a legislator, especially when a critical vote is coming up
Sometimes an in-depth conversation with a legislator is possible; at other times, a call may simply be tallied by staff

Be sure to let staff know you are a board member, as the legislator may take your call

When Making a Call ...

- Ask to speak with the senator or representative, but be prepared to discuss the issue with staff
- Give your name, title, and the name of the school board on which you serve
- Focus the call on one issue or bill
- Briefly state the position you wish the legislator to take, ask the member's position, and be prepared to offer a rationale based on local impact
- Offer to meet, or to have MABE follow-up

Write a Letter

Letters provide a unique opportunity to enclose additional materials such as testimony and resolutions, copies of related correspondence, and the handwritten touch

Mail is much slower than a call or email, but effective if sent well in advance of pending action

Letters are added to the bill file, so can have a major impact on voting

Schedule a Meeting

Meeting in person with a legislator, member of the state board, or key staff person, is the most effective way to share the board's position and influence legislation.

Call MABE's office to advise that a meeting has been scheduled, as there are often details and background information that MABE can provide

Share outcomes & impressions

Testifying in Committee

Committee hearings are an integral part of the legislative process in Annapolis.

Those testifying are typically given three minutes.

While formal training is not necessary in order to testify, there are many things that can be done to prepare which will strengthen testimony before a legislative committee.

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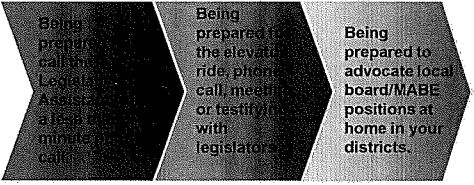
Responding to Calls to Action

- ✓ Call
- ✓ Provide bill title & action requested
- ✓ Say thank you

MABE

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You can do this!



Being prepared to call the Legislature. Assist a legislator with calls.

Being prepared for the elevator ride, phone call, meeting or testimony with legislators.

Being prepared to advocate local board/MABE positions at home in your districts.
