

# Maryland Association of Boards of Education

## Legislative Committee

Issue Update  
November 18, 2013

### Emerging 2014 Session Issue – Early Advocacy Alert

**Maryland Education Credit** - Parents and supporters of Catholic and private school education are being asked to promote passage of the Maryland Education Credit (MEC). According to the website, [www.educationmaryland.org](http://www.educationmaryland.org), this bill would provide tax credits to businesses that donate to nonprofit organizations that support public and nonpublic school students. The bill would give businesses a 60% tax credit on donations up to \$200,000 to nonprofit Student Assistance Organizations, to help pay for tuition, supplies, tutoring, etc. The bill would allow up to \$15 million in tax credits; 60% to go to Catholic and nonpublic schools, and 40% to public schools. Tax credits would be allowed on a first-come, first-serve basis until the cap is reached.

MABE has consistently opposed, and the General Assembly has rejected, this type of legislation because it would facilitate the funding of private and parochial tuition scholarships through an income tax credit program.

**MABE encourages boards and board members to remind legislators why we oppose private school vouchers and the funding of private school student scholarships through a new tax credit program.**

**ACTION: Urge your legislators to NOT cosponsor the Private School Maryland Education Credit bill.**

### Why MABE opposes the Private School Maryland Education Credit (Private School MEC)

- We oppose creating a new income tax credit program fund private and parochial schools through tuition scholarships, or vouchers.
- We oppose the bill's shift toward State subsidies for private and parochial schools, in the absence of greater fiscal and performance accountability for these schools.
- We are especially concerned that the success of an "income tax credit for vouchers program" will be measured in lost revenue to the State's general fund – the sole source of State funding for public education.
- We oppose foregoing limited tax revenues in exchange for a program which will provide additional grants to private and parochial schools.
- We urge the General Assembly to reject outright the introduction of private school vouchers in Maryland; vouchers financed by this lost revenue.

### Why Private School MECs are like vouchers

Voucher programs involve direct payments of public funds to parents in the form of *individual scholarships to send their children to private/parochial schools*. Tuition tax credit programs involve income tax credits to offset a significant percentage of the value of contributions to organizations which in turn distribute those dollars to schools to provide to parents in the form of *individual scholarships to send their children to private/parochial schools*. In the first case, tax dollars are allocated from the State budget. In the second case, tax dollars are diverted before being received by the State. Again, local boards of education urge the General Assembly to keep their "eyes on the prize" and continue to invest taxpayer dollars in our public schools – schools with open doors to all of Maryland's children every day.

Link to [MABE's testimony](#) opposing a similar bill in 2012.

## **MACo Adopts Top 2014 Initiatives**

At its September 18 meeting, the Legislative Committee formally adopted the proposed initiatives for the 2014 session, a work product of the Association's Initiatives Subcommittee. The Initiatives Subcommittee met through the summer to refine and focus a list of 20 initiatives into no more than four, as required by the Association's bylaws.

The 2014 Initiatives are a very proactive agenda which will span across all budget and policy committees of the General Assembly. With the years of budget deficits behind us, MACo has adopted an initiative to advocate for additional State transportation funding. MACo has also responded to county concerns in other policy areas, adopting initiatives to seek greater school board / county cooperation in education funding, expand targeted uses of the Bay Restoration Fund, and establish a cooperative governance structure better enabling counties to join the State's 700 MHz public safety communication system.

The items adopted as legislative initiatives are as follows:

**Transportation Funding Restoration** – Funding to local governments has been reduced significantly over the past several years as the State has worked to address its structural deficit. The largest of these reductions has been to Highway User Revenues (HUR), an unprecedented 95% reduction, which has made it extremely difficult for local governments to maintain and improve their local roadways. Prior to these reductions taking place, local governments received 30% of HUR and the State received 70%. Now local governments are receiving just under 10% of these revenues. A former Commission recommended the incremental restoration of HUR back to the original shared distribution and a new task force will look at HUR as a part of its charge. MACo urges state policymakers to evaluate highway funding and the effects of these drastic local reductions to Maryland's roadways – and to take necessary steps to restore HUR and local roadway infrastructure.

**Empowering School Board/County Partnerships** – Local school boards and county governments share the responsibility for the education and well-being of schoolchildren. Creating a "fast track" state approval for local agreements on funding initiatives will encourage school boards and county governments to uncover new cost-saving strategies and improve the effectiveness of both system operations and classroom education. Reducing disincentives for discretionary education funding can encourage county support for innovative pilot programs, and more fairly recognize short-term needs or investments as outside perpetual funding mandates.

**Leverage Bay Restoration Funds to Target Failing Septics** – As counties struggle to reduce water pollution under the Chesapeake Bay and local Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs), MACo has advocated that counties be given a broad array of "tools" to help them meet their water quality goals. One cost-effective and environmentally responsible "tool" would be to expand when septic system monies within the Bay Restoration Fund may be used to extend public sewer to failing septic systems. The 2011 Task Force on Sustainable Growth and Wastewater Disposal supported the expansion provided there were safeguards against sprawl development occurring along the extension. Legislation could require an exception process and include adequate safeguards.

**Collaborative Public Safety Radio Systems** – Maryland FIRST is a statewide radio communication system which will improve police, fire, and emergency management communications for our first responders, allowing them to more effectively and efficiently respond to emergency situations within certain regions and across county lines. Counties who choose to participate in this statewide system will realize seamless "interoperability" and lower infrastructure, equipment, and maintenance costs through shared resources. Shared State and county efforts require a commitment from all levels of government and a structure to ensure the operational needs of all users are considered. The creation of a governance board with committed representatives of the State and county partners will protect everyone's interests and provide county users with a role in the system's oversight and management, including infrastructure sharing coordination, network prioritization, standardized operations, and financial decisions.