

BILL: House Bill 109
TITLE: Public Schools - Health and Safety - Food Transparency
POSITION: OPPOSE
DATE: February 4, 2016
COMMITTEE: Ways and Means Committee
CONTACT: John R. Woolums, Esq.

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) opposes House Bill 109.

This legislation would require each local school system to include food and drink items that are sold à la carte on monthly dining menus. MABE opposes this bill because it would inappropriately impose a mandate on all public school systems in a manner that is not consistent with recognizing the local availability of resources and the relative local priority of implementing these procedures. Certainly, some local school systems already fulfill the requirements set forth in this legislation. However, at this time of constrained budgets, both at the state and local levels, MABE respectfully requests the legislature's restraint in not adopting newly mandated programs and services.

MABE recognizes the importance of developing healthy school environments, which includes providing high quality health and physical education programs as well as meeting the nutritional needs of students through school breakfasts, lunches, after school meals, and vending machine policies. Local school system policies stress the importance to students of physical activity in maintaining good health and that improve the nutritional quality of foods and beverages provided in the public school setting. Local boards of education, superintendents, and the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), work collaboratively to achieve these goals.

Federal and state standards for student health and fitness, especially regarding nutrition, continue to be reformed and enhanced to address the national epidemics of juvenile diabetes and obesity. At the same time, child hunger and inequitable access to healthy meals impacts far too many students as an obstacle to learning. The good news is that school systems are increasingly involved in summer and weekend meal programs; and partnerships to help ensure daily access to healthy food for all students.

The federal government is also engaged in promoting improvements in expanding access to high quality school meal programs. The 2010 Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization, entitled the "The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act", mandated major reforms in school meal programs to improve the nutritional value of the meals served to Maryland students each day. Today, another 5-year reauthorization bill is being considered, the "Improving Child Nutrition, Integrity and Access Act of 2016." In this context, Maryland's local school systems and food service programs respectfully request that no new state requirements be enacted at this time.

For these reasons, MABE requests an unfavorable report on House Bill 109.