

BILL: Senate Bill 767
TITLE: Education – Beginning of School Year – After Labor Day
POSITION: OPPOSE
DATE: March 2, 2016
COMMITTEE: Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee
CONTACT: John R. Woolums, Esq.

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE), representing all of the State's local boards of education, opposes Senate Bill 767, which would prohibit public schools from opening before the day after Labor Day.

MABE supports preserving and protecting the rights of local communities and their respective boards of education to adopt school calendars; school calendars that reflect not only state testing schedules and mandated holidays, but also other important local considerations. Local boards serve a broad constituency of professional educators, parents, students, businesses and other community groups. Local boards believe that imposing a statewide start date for the school year would impose unwarranted restrictions on the prerogative of local communities to consider and decide on their local school system calendar.

Adopting a school calendar involves local considerations which are significant, affecting thousands of school employees and families. School systems annually negotiate teacher and employee contracts that reflect available resources and commitments to providing professional development and accommodating instructional planning and assessment preparation and grading. School system calendars also feature built-in flexibility to allow for adjustments resulting from inclement weather. Each school calendar also reflects local traditions and preferences regarding the length of breaks for Thanksgiving, winter holidays, religious holidays, and spring break. In this light, MABE supports preserving local discretion when it comes to deciding when to start the school year.

MABE takes no position on whether any local board should choose to adopt a start date after Labor Day. Again, this and other policy decisions should continue to reside with each local board. Maryland's nationally recognized success in providing a high quality public education throughout the state is the direct result of the policies and priorities adopted by each of the twenty-four local boards. Maryland's local boards recognize and affirm that a basic premise of our nation's system of public education is that public schools should be governed locally. Most importantly, Maryland's twenty-four local boards have a proven record of succeeding in balancing community priorities and available resources in pursuit of the overarching goal of improving student learning.

Maryland's local boards of education oppose mandating a post-Labor Day start date because it would not adequately reflect local community considerations; considerations which local boards must always balance in favor of advancing student learning. MABE believes that if pre-Labor Day instruction is deemed by boards and educators, and other community voices, to be in the best interests of students in a local school system, Maryland's state officials should continue to respect and defer to these local decisions. For these reasons, MABE urges this committee to issue an unfavorable report on Senate Bill 767.