

BILL: House Bill 458
TITLE: Visual Impairments - Requirements for Teacher Training, Student Screening, and Maryland Medical Assistance Program Coverage
POSITION: OPPOSE
DATE: February 14, 2017
COMMITTEE: Ways and Means Committee
CONTACT: John R. Woolums, Esq.

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE), representing all of the state's twenty-four local boards of education, opposes House Bill 458.

Local boards of education support investments and enhancements in programs to ensure that teachers are highly qualified and highly effective in the classroom. Being highly effective in today's classrooms requires teachers to be adept at an array of teaching techniques and differentiated instruction to address diverse student learning styles. In this context, MABE appreciates the intent of this bill to promote comprehensive reforms in the certification of teachers and in the screening of students for visual impairments.

MABE recognizes the imperative that state certification requirements are consistent with the goal of preparing teachers for the breadth and depth of instructional challenges and learning opportunities presented by each unique child. However, MABE opposes legislative proposals regarding the development and administration of teacher certification and professional development standards. Instead, local boards support the development and implementation of specific teacher education and certification requirements through the collaboration of MSDE, the Professional Standards and Teacher Education Board (PSTEB), and higher education.

In 1991, the Maryland General Assembly enacted legislation that created the Professional Standards and Teacher Education Board (PSTEB). This semi-autonomous board is composed of 25 members and shares, with the State Board of Education, the authority to develop rules and regulations for the certification of teachers and other professional personnel and requirements for the preparation of teachers and other education personnel. Similarly, the bill proposes to define the technical parameters of the computerized screening for visual impairments of students. MABE believes the scope and specificity of these requirements are more appropriately in the purview of state regulations.

In closing, MABE's position on this bill is grounded in the support for the decision making processes of the Professional Standards and Teacher Education Board and MSDE regarding the proposed reforms to student vision screening and the professional certification standards for educators.

For these reasons, MABE requests an unfavorable report on House Bill 458.