

**BILL:** House Bill 512  
**TITLE:** The James Samuel Coleman Act of 2017  
**POSITION:** OPPOSE  
**DATE:** February 21, 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 local boards of education, opposes House Bill 512, which would, in part, establish a new and radically different system for determining school board composition, and the geographic boundaries of school systems and individual school attendance areas.

MABE believes local school boards are among the nation's preeminent expressions of grassroots democracy; and that a basic premise of our nation's system of public education is that public schools should be governed locally. MABE upholds the principle of local governance by boards of education is fundamental to a sound system of public education; and that a sound system of public education is fundamental to sustaining the well-educated citizenry essential to a flourishing democracy.

By retaining decision-making authority at the local level, local boards of education can best balance educational practices, available resources to implement those practices, public input, and academic and financial accountability. Local boards play a vital role in governing the local school system, advocating for public education, and engaging local communities and promoting participation by parents and other community members in the education process so that everyone feels a responsibility for, and ownership of, Maryland's public schools and our students' futures.

In this context, MABE believes that legislation which limits local board decision-making authority may weaken the board's bond with the local community and adversely impact the community's participation in the governance and operation of their local school system; especially in light of the critical role of local tax revenues in funding schools and school facilities. House Bill 512 would do so by radically reforming the structure and geographic boundaries of school boards and school systems. In addition the bill would create a process for determining attendance boundaries for individual schools designed to maximize the socioeconomic diversity of each school's students. In these ways this legislation would dislocate the relationships between county governments, boards of education, and communities. MABE opposes this legislation because such radical changes are not warranted in light of the successes achieved within the current framework.

Today, Maryland's local boards of education exercise a considerable scope of independent governance authority while doing so in compliance with state and federal laws administered by an array of state and federal agencies. Most importantly, local boards govern in conjunction with the State Board of Education, which adopts statewide policies and regulations; and issues legal opinions binding on all boards. MABE believes that this balance of state board and local board governance has yielded outstanding public schools and learning outcomes for millions of students.

The 2001 Thornton Commission recommendations and 2002 Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools Act are premised on the belief that there should be a direct link between what is expected of school systems in terms of student performance and the level of State funding that school systems receive. In 2009, MGT of America issued a report confirming that the increased funding provided by the Bridge to Excellence Act resulted in significantly increased student performance for all students, including minority and economically disadvantaged students.

The links between governance, standards, and funding are strong. Maryland has adopted a State school finance system that defines “adequacy” of funding as the total projected costs associated with meeting State performance standards, including the additional costs associated with providing services to students with special needs, e.g., special education, limited English proficient, and economically disadvantaged. Correspondingly, Maryland places a high priority on “equity” of funding, which is achieved through a State school funding system that wealth equalizes education aid so that per pupil State aid in less wealthy jurisdictions is greater than per pupil State aid in more wealthy jurisdictions.

Affirming and building upon these principles, the Kirwan Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education to develop education funding reforms to support the teaching and learning of tomorrow. MABE strongly encourages the continued commitment and dedication of state policy makers to the pursuit of the adequate and equitable resources to support local school systems’ efforts to provide high quality teaching and learning environments for all students.

House Bill 512 would also threaten the stability and strength of the funding relationships between the 24 local governments and local school systems. Maryland’s public school students benefit from the affirmative commitment of local governments to provide annual increases in public education funding which meet or exceed the minimum maintenance of effort funding level. Local boards greatly appreciate the fact that local funding is essential to the current and continued success of Maryland’s public schools, as it represents half of the total revenues provided to Maryland’s 24 fiscally dependent school systems.

In light of the success achieved by Maryland public schools within the parameters of the Maryland’s dynamic state and local governance system and school finance system, MABE is strongly opposed to the restructuring proposed by House Bill 512.

For these reasons, MABE requests an unfavorable report on House Bill 512.