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BILL: House Bill 590
TITLE: State Board of Education - Membership - Teachers and Parents
DATE: February 21, 2017
POSITION: OPPOSE
COMMITTEE: Ways and Means Committee
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The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) opposes House Bill 590. This bill would impose unwarranted restrictions on the membership of an expanded State Board of Education, by mandating a role for the Maryland PTA and Maryland State Education Association and teachers in selecting a total of 5 new members.

MABE is a strong advocate for parental involvement in public education, recognizing that supportive and involved parents are essential partners for their children's education. However, MABE does not support legislation to require that at least two members of the State Board of Education be parents of students enrolled in public schools and selected from a list submitted by the Maryland PTA. MABE has consistently opposed this type of legislative proposal because it would impose an unnecessarily restrictive criteria on the qualifications of candidates for openings on the State Board.

House Bill 590 could have the unintended consequence of excluding potential State Board members with outstanding records of parental involvement. The bill could do so by limiting eligibility for the 2 new parent members in a manner that results in excluding other candidates. MABE recognizes that State Board members who have, or have had, children enrolled in public schools may make positive contributions to the deliberations of the State Board through sharing their experiences and perspectives. However, it is important to consider that many State Board members once had children enrolled in public schools, participated for years in their local PTAs, and even served on their local board of education, but by the time they were appointed to the State Board no longer had children of elementary or secondary school age. Again, MABE strongly endorses parental involvement in public education, and opposes this bill because it unduly restricts the criteria for 2 new members of the State Board of Education.

In addition, MABE has raised the concern that the approach of adding designated parent representatives on the State Board could lead to proposals for other restrictive membership criteria. This bill includes precisely this type of criteria by proposing to add 3 teachers selected by a statewide election among teachers. House Bill 590 would result in 30 percent of the State Board being comprised of 5 representatives of two distinct groups. MABE respectfully requests that the legislature reject such proposals, recognizing that the State Board considers issues that impact many more constituencies than could ever be represented by designated positions on the board.

For these reasons, MABE urges this Committee to issue an unfavorable report on House Bill 590.