

BILL: House Bill 845
TITLE: Education - Public School Indoor Air Quality
POSITION: OPPOSE
DATE: February 21, 2017
COMMITTEE: Appropriations Committee
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The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) opposes House Bill 845. MABE opposes this bill because it would impose significant new costs and divert resources to enforcement actions regarding the condition of school facilities in areas already managed within existing guidelines and regulations.

Under this bill, the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) would be required to develop a new inspection and enforcement program, the Public School Indoor Air Quality Inspection, Evaluation, and Notification Program; and take complaints and enforcement actions against school principals.

MABE agrees that indoor air and environmental quality are important school facility health and safety concerns; and assures the General Assembly that several specific laws and regulations are already establishing high standards to address them. For example, the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) program sets the green building certification program requirements, including indoor air quality, for the construction and major renovations of Maryland's public schools. In addition, the Interagency Committee on School Construction has adopted especially stringent indoor air quality standards for the unique challenges posed by relocatable classrooms. Other programs and procedures are in place regarding the routine maintenance and operation of healthy public schools.

"Indoor air quality" (IAQ) refers to the adequacy of ventilation, absence of mold and other irritants and/or pollutants, and other facets of maintaining a healthy respiratory environment for school students and staff. MABE agrees that ensuring indoor air quality in the public school setting is an important component of a school system's strategy to maintain healthy school environments. In fact, MABE actively promotes the use of the U.S. EPA's Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) Tools for Schools guidelines and materials. MABE recognizes the value of these tools in helping to ensure good indoor air quality, and reduce the risks of student and employee health problems. MABE urges members of the General Assembly to promote a robust state school construction program, and to urge local officials to fund school maintenance budgets which are critical to providing healthy school environments – and often the first place where cuts are made. However, in light of the existing breadth and depth of efforts being made regarding IAQ standards and best practices.

Local school systems devote considerable staff time and resources to efforts to provide healthy school environments, including addressing indoor air quality issues. Risk managers and facility maintenance staff recognize the need for a comprehensive preventative management strategy, including educating and training staff, and providing them with the maintenance budgets to support these strategies. For example, routine cleaning and/or replacement of filters for HVAC systems is a simple yet essential component of a successful IAQ program. In addition, routine monitoring coupled with prompt responses to problems when they do occur can avoid the emergence of more serious and costly problems.

Again, MABE agrees that indoor air and environmental quality represent important public health and safety issues; and assures the legislature that local school systems and professional staff are working daily to address these issues. However, local boards would prefer to focus on securing sufficient state and local funding for school construction and maintenance programs, rather than diverting state and local resources to the costs of enforcement actions and litigation. For these reasons, MABE requests an unfavorable report on House Bill 845.