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BILL: House Bill 880
TITLE: Open Meetings Act - Required Training for Members of Public Bodies
DATE: February 15, 2017
POSITION: SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS
COMMITTEE: Health and Government Operations Committee
CONTACT: John R. Woolums, Esq.

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE), representing all of the state's local boards of education, supports House Bill 880, with the amendment described below.

This bill would modify a recent requirement that each public body, including local boards of education, designate an employee, officer, or member to receive training on the Maryland Open Meetings Act. The bill would repeal and replace this requirement with much broader mandate that all members of public bodies, including local boards of education, either complete a training class or submit a letter to the Open Meetings Compliance Board (OMCB) indicating an inability or unwillingness to complete the training.

The amendment MABE requests would add the training provided to school board members by MABE to the roster of approved training programs. Specifically, the amendment would insert, after line 14 on page 2, "(III) a class on the requirements of the open meetings law offered by the Maryland Association of Boards of Education through the Boardsmanship Academy Program; or". In this way, MABE could contribute significantly to the operation of the legislative intent to ensure the training on the Open Meetings Act of all members of public bodies, including members of local boards of education.

MABE strongly supports the spirit and intent of Maryland's Open Meetings Act, which holds: "It is essential to the maintenance of a democratic society that, except in special and appropriate circumstances: (1) public business be conducted openly and publicly; and (2) the public be allowed to observe: (i) the performance of public officials; and (ii) the deliberations and decisions that the making of public policy involves." The statute further provides: "The conduct of public business in open meetings increases the faith of the public in government and enhances the effectiveness of the public in fulfilling its role in a democratic society." In this spirit, MABE looks forward to participating fully in the statewide efforts to ensure that members of public bodies receive training on the Open Meetings Act.

For these reasons, MABE requests a favorable report on House Bill 880, with the amendment described above.