

BILL: Senate Bill 153
TITLE: Public Schools - Length of School Year Adjustment - State of Emergency
POSITION: SUPPORT
DATE: February 1, 2017
COMMITTEE: Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
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The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE), representing all of the State's local boards of education, supports Senate Bill 153.

This bill authorizes a local board of education to reduce the length of the school year by up to five school days if the opening of schools for student attendance is prevented due to conditions in which the Governor has declared a state of emergency. The authorization provided under the bill for local board action on the school year calendar would not require applying to the State Board of Education for a waiver.

On August 31 and October 11, 2016 Governor Hogan signed Executive Orders establishing a statewide school year beginning in 2017 which must commence no sooner than a post-Labor Day start date and conclude with an end-date of no later than June 15. The Executive Order issued on October 11 superseded the earlier version by clarifying the waiver criteria to be applied by the State Board of Education. However, the State Board's authority to grant a waiver is conditioned on the following compelling justifications:

- The adoption of an innovative school schedule for low-performing, at-risk, or charter schools; or
- The school system has closed ten days or more per year during any of the two of the last five years because of natural disasters, civil disasters, or severe weather conditions.

These criteria provide at least some opportunity for local flexibility in crafting the local school year calendar, but are very specifically defined, and also require that local public hearings be held and that the State Board issue a waiver. On January 24, 2017 the State Board of Education approved school calendar waivers from the Allegany and Garrett County Boards of Education to begin their 2017-2018 school year before Labor Day. These waivers requests were based on the weather condition criteria.

MABE supports Senate Bill 153 in order to establish a reasonable and efficient process of allowing a local board of education to modify the local school year calendar based on an officially declared state of emergency.

For these reasons, MABE requests a favorable report on Senate Bill 153.