

**BILL:** Senate Bill 201  
**TITLE:** Education – Fire Drill Requirements – State Fire Prevention Code  
**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 201.

This bill would provide for a much needed update to the State regulations governing the number of fire drills which must be conducted in public schools during the school year. Importantly, this update is consistent with the adopted State Fire Prevention Code, thereby ensuring that school systems continue to adhere to the highest of public safety standards.

The State Fire Prevention Code appropriately establishes fire requirements based on the presence of automatic sprinkler systems. Therefore, under Senate Bill 201, schools with automatic sprinkler systems would be required to hold five fire drills per year, with at least two occurring in the first four months of the school year. However, schools not fully protected by an automatic sprinkler system would be required to hold eight fire drills annually, with at least three scheduled in the first four months of the school year.

Safety and security in public schools is extremely important to local boards of education for the protection of students and staff, as well as necessary to environments conducive to teaching and learning. MABE believes that safety in public schools is the joint responsibility of local boards of education, school administrators and staff, students, parents and guardians, law enforcement and other public safety agencies, human services agencies, and the community in general. This coordination is especially important in the area of developing state and local policies on emergency plans.

Maryland regulations (COMAR 13A.02.02.01 –.04) require the adoption, implementation and annual certification of local school system emergency plans as follows:

- A. In consultation with other health and safety officials in the local community, each local school system shall develop an emergency plan for each public school and central administration office under its jurisdiction that:
  - (1) Deals with the contingencies of man-made, technological, and natural hazards; and
  - (2) Conforms to the requirements of this chapter.
- B. Each public school emergency plan shall be on file in each public school system.
- C. Each local school system shall develop and implement an annual schedule of drills for each school within the system.

An emergency plan is defined as a plan for each school system and each public school within the school system that addresses mitigation, preparation, response, and recovery to an emergency including responding to: (a) Violent or traumatic events on school grounds during regular school hours or during school-sponsored activities; or (b) Events in the community that affect normal school functioning.

In 2013, the State Board of Education revised the state and local emergency planning process in accordance with legislation enacted in response to the December 2012 mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, on January 16, 2013 (Senate Bill 143, Chapter 187, 2013 Laws of Maryland). The regulations mandate that local school system emergency plans must be aligned with the MSDE Emergency Planning Guidelines for Local School Systems and Schools (April 2013), which the regulations incorporate by reference (COMAR 13A.02.02.04). The Emergency Planning Guidelines provide explanations of the emergency management process, with elements including prevention/mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery. The Guidelines also govern the plan development process, and local training, testing and evaluation of the plans.

MABE supports Senate Bill 201 because it would allow school systems to balance the impact on instructional time of the combined fire drills and many other school safety drills now being conducted annually in every school in the State. Again, this bill would provide a much needed update that is entirely consistent with the maintenance of high safety standards.

For these reasons, MABE requests a favorable report on Senate Bill 201.