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BILL: Senate Bill 557
TITLE: Education – Maryland Education Opportunity Account Program –
Established
POSITION: OPPOSE
DATE: February 23, 2017
COMMITTEE: Budget and Taxation Committee
CONTACT: John R. Woolums, Esq.

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) opposes Senate Bill 557, which would establish a publicly funded account to allocate vouchers to parents of students attending private schools for expenses including textbooks, fees, and tuition.

MABE opposes creating a new state program and governing authority to oversee and administer the funding of expenses of private and parochial school students. The State's constitutional mandate is to place public education first among other budget priorities. Upholding this priority is critical to the continued success of our public schools. MABE and the local boards we represent believe strongly that action to establish a state-administered private school voucher program or insert private school voucher funding into the State Budget is wholly inconsistent with adequately and equitably meeting the needs of Maryland's more than 870,000 prekindergarten through 12th grade public school students.

MABE and all local boards of education support strong public accountability measures for every public dollar spent on education. Programs in non-public schools, both non-sectarian and parochial, are not linked to federal, State or local accountability measures. In addition, non-public schools generally are not subject to the same legal regulations as public schools, such as special education laws and teacher certification regulations.

Local boards of education urge the General Assembly to continue to invest taxpayer dollars, and state agency resources, in supporting our public schools – schools with open doors to all of Maryland's children every day – schools which are recognized nationally for excellence across the spectrum of programs from high quality early education programs to equitable access to rigorous academic offerings in high school.

Again, MABE opposes establishing and providing state funding for a Maryland Education Opportunity Account Program and Authority to finance the tuition and other expenses of students attending private and parochial schools.

For these reasons, MABE requests an unfavorable report on Senate Bill 557.