

BILL: House Bill 270
TITLE: Environment - Testing for Lead in Drinking Water - Public and Nonpublic Schools
POSITION: OPPOSE
DATE: February 24, 2017
COMMITTEE: Environment and Transportation Committee
Ways and means Committee
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The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) opposes House Bill 270. MABE agrees that eliminating any student exposure to elevated lead levels in drinking water, to the extent present in public schools, is a critically important public health and safety issue. However, this bill would impose significant new costs on local school systems regarding the condition of school facilities in an area already managed within existing guidelines and regulations.

Under this bill, the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) would be required to adopt regulations requiring the testing of all drinking water outlets in schools for elevated levels of lead. To be clear, MABE in no way opposes such testing, or the essential responsibility of local boards of education and school systems to ensure the highest standards of health and safety for students and staff in all of our school facilities. However, MABE is concerned that the program proposed by this bill would impose the burden of universal lead testing on school systems, and potentially impose the burden of costly remediation projects, without providing additional financial resources.

MABE agrees that the identification of, and protection of students from exposure to, lead in school drinking water is of the highest priority. Local school systems devote considerable staff time and resources to efforts to provide healthy school environments, including addressing water 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. Routine monitoring coupled with prompt responses to problems when they do occur can avoid the emergence of more serious and costly problems.

In this context, on behalf of all local boards, MABE would respectfully request that if periodic lead testing is to be mandated, that costs are covered, the responsibility to implement specific mitigation responses is clarified, and the timeline to complete the required testing is extended. For example, under a statewide program recently launched in California, all schools are eligible for free lead testing. Similarly, local school systems recognize the responsibility to act immediately to provide clean drinking water and to shut off access to any contaminated drinking water fountains. Again, On behalf of local boards, MABE assures the legislature that local school systems and professional staff are working daily to address these issues.

For these reasons, MABE requests an unfavorable report on House Bill 270.