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BILL: Senate Bill 1089
TITLE: Primary and Secondary Education - Health and Safety Guidelines and Procedures - Digital Devices
POSITION: OPPOSE
DATE: March 15, 2017
COMMITTEE: Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee
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The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) opposes Senate Bill 1089, which proposes to mandate compliance with as yet undeveloped health and safety guidelines regarding student use of digital devices in public schools.

MABE appreciates the intent of this legislation to call on the Departments of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) and Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to develop health and safety guidelines for the use of digital devices in public schools. However, MABE is opposed to the bill's prospective mandate that would trigger school system compliance with the guidelines once developed.

Maryland's local boards of education know that the ability to use technology is essential to student success in the 21st century. Boards recognize that advances in technology, including computerization, telecommunications, mobile technologies, and other resources, have the proven potential to significantly improve student performance through access to information and enriched educational experiences. If safety standards are to be developed, MABE and local school systems would participate fully in the process of reviewing and commenting on any instructional or administrative proposals regarding these issues.

Student access to standards-aligned digital resources and virtual learning opportunities are being advanced through collaboration among local school systems and the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), through initiatives such as the Maryland Virtual Learning Opportunities Program (MVLO), and the Maryland Virtual School (MVS) Program. Maryland adopted its first state education technology plan in 1995, and continues to update the plan, to ensure that students and staff realize the optimum benefits from technology in the classroom. The state plan includes objectives to:

- Improve student learning through technology;
- Improve staff's knowledge and skills to integrate technology into instruction;
- Improve decision-making, productivity, and efficiency throughout the school system through the use of technology;
- Improve equitable access to appropriate technologies among all stakeholders; and
- Improve the instructional uses of technology through research and evaluation.

Today, nearly all of Maryland's classrooms have the capability to take advantage of the Internet and the state continues to make progress toward the goal of having 100 percent of classrooms connected for wireless connectivity. MABE is resolved to continue to support programs to: prepare students for college and career readiness through access to online learning, educational technologies, and high-quality digital content; create a fully technology-proficient PreK-12 educator workforce; and provide equitable access to current and emerging technologies for all students and educators and expanded opportunities for parents, families and the community.

For these reasons, MABE requests an unfavorable report on Senate Bill 1089.