

BILL: Senate Bill 161
TITLE: Public and Nonpublic Schools - Student Sickle Cell Disease Management Programs
DATE: January 24, 2018
POSITION: SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS
COMMITTEE: Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
CONTACT: John R. Woolums, Esq.

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE), representing all of the state's local boards of education, supports Senate Bill 161 with amendments.

MABE appreciates the intent of this legislation to ensure a high degree of care and heightened awareness among school personnel regarding the needs of students with sickle cell disease. Local boards of education place a very high priority on student health, by ensuring that schools are operating in accordance with adopted state school health guidelines and local policies and procedures intended to provide a health and safe school environment conducive to student learning.

However, school system health professionals have raised serious concerns regarding this bill as introduced. Local school systems are already operating in accordance with Maryland law that already provides for emergency care planning for all students under the Code of Maryland Regulations 7-401 and 7-426. Sickle cell disease falls under these guidelines and ensures that students with sickle cell disease are able to access educational services and school activities. Similarly, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act protects students with sickle cell disease and their rights for accommodations in the school setting, just as it does for other students with other health conditions warranting educational accommodations. Specifically, accommodations for students with sickle cell disease may include water to ensure hydration, nursing services for pain management, training for school staff to identify symptoms which may indicate a crisis, the development of individualized healthcare plans and/or emergency care plans.

MABE understands that amendments are being developed to more closely align this legislation with the legislation recently enacted to address very similar concerns regarding the school health management system for students with diabetes. In 2016, House Bill 771 was enacted to require MSDE and DHMH to establish guidelines for public schools regarding the administration of health care services to students with diabetes and provide specified technical assistance to schools to implement the guidelines.

MABE has learned that the need for school health guidelines regarding the care of students with sickle cell disease have been brought to the attention of the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) and the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) and that these guidelines have been prioritized and will be developed in consultation with experts and stakeholders. In this context, MABE requests amendments to Senate Bill 161 to ensure that this process involves the appropriate stakeholders and is completed in a timely manner. MABE looks forward to supporting the passage of this legislation if amended to reflect the integrated approach developed in response to concerns with school health services for students with diabetes.

For these reasons, MABE requests a favorable report on Senate Bill 161 with the amendments described above.