

BILL: Senate Bill 665
TITLE: Education – Robotics Grant Program – Nonprofit Robotics Clubs
DATE: February 28, 2018
POSITION: OPPOSE
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, opposes Senate Bill 665.

MABE opposes this legislation because it would invest public funds, now designated for public school robotics clubs, in similar clubs located in private schools. MABE continues to strongly oppose legislative and budgetary actions which result in the expansion of the State's direct public funding of private and parochial education. 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.

Since 2016, the State Budget has inappropriately provided millions of dollars in special funds from the Cigarette Restitution Fund to fund a private school voucher program. MABE believes that based on the performance of this program and the competing priority of meaningful increases in state aid for public education, the BOOST program should be eliminated and the millions in funding shifted to public education priorities. BOOST is particularly relevant to this bill because of the anti-discrimination requirements for schools receiving public funding through the BOOST voucher funding and the textbook and computer local program.

To be eligible to participate in the BOOST program, a nonpublic school must participate in the Aid to Non-Public Schools Program for textbooks and computers administered by MSDE; and comply with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and not discriminate in student admissions on the basis of race, color, national origin, or sexual orientation. Senate Bill 665 would not require nonpublic schools benefitting from the robotics club grants to agree to not discriminate in their admissions or employment practices.

Generally, nonpublic schools, including non-sectarian and parochial schools, are not subject to the same legal regulations as public schools. The vast majority of nonpublic school programs are not linked to state or federal student performance accountability measures, or special education provisions of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). In addition, many parochial schools instruct their students in particular religions, a practice that is unconstitutional in public schools and which public funds may not directly support.

For these reasons, MABE requests an unfavorable report on Senate Bill 665.