

BILL: House Bill 153
TITLE: Building Opportunity Act of 2019
DATE: February 28, 2019
POSITION: OPPOSE
COMMITTEE: Appropriations Committee
CONTACT: John R. Woolums, Esq.

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) opposes House Bill 153 because it would utilize a major portion of the “lockbox” Education Trust Fund, generated as additional school funding following the 2018 referendum, to launch a major school construction and renovation funding initiative. In the alternative, MABE supports House Bill 727, which would dedicate State Lottery revenues instead.

This bill would authorize the Maryland Stadium Authority (MSA) to issue up to \$1.8 billion in revenue bonds, backed by annual payments of \$125 million from the Education Trust Fund and casino gambling revenues beginning in FY 2021, with the proceeds to be used for much needed public school construction and renovation projects. MABE appreciates the Governor’s intent to expand of the scope of the State’s investment high quality learning environments for students and educators, but opposes the funding source. MABE firmly believes that the intended purpose of the more than \$500 million in casino revenues now slated for increased direct aid to public education is to implement the recommendations of the Kirwan Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education.

MABE has participated fully in the Kirwan Commission’s work and supports its focus on significantly increasing the State’s investment in a high performing, innovative statewide system of public schools. MABE supports advancing the goal of improving Maryland schools to ensure our students are equally as prepared as students educated in the world’s highest performing school systems. MABE strongly supports the Commission’s recommendations requiring equitable access to an excellent education for all students in all twenty-four school systems.

For MABE and Maryland’s 24 local school boards, the mission to provide all of Maryland’s students with high performing school facilities conducive to learning is a top priority. The Maryland Constitution requires that the State provide a “thorough and efficient” system of public education; and MABE believes that this includes the duty to equitably provide safe, high quality school facilities in which all students can learn.

Maryland has an outstanding public school construction program that has achieved a remarkable degree of equity and excellence across the diverse landscape of Maryland’s local school systems. And yet, continuous improvement must be promoted and pursued in order to incorporate new best practices and optimize what are always limited, and therefore inadequate, state and local resources. MABE supported the formation of the Knott Commission and the passage of the 21st Century School facilities Act to improve an already strong statewide program.

However, local boards strongly oppose the bill’s proposal to require MOUs that would shift the local board’s role and responsibility to design and oversee the construction of school projects to the Stadium Authority. While MABE acknowledges there is a waiver option available, we believe it would be the exception and not the rule, and not ensure local oversight of school facility projects in the vast majority of local school systems.

For these reasons, MABE requests an unfavorable report on House Bill 153.