

BILL: House Bill 423
TITLE: Election Law - Voter Registration - High Schools
DATE: February 12, 2019
POSITION: OPPOSE
COMMITTEE: Ways and Means Committee
CONTACT: John R. Woolums, Esq.

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) opposes House Bill 423 as introduced.

The bill would require the State Board of Elections to designate public and private high schools as voter registration entities where designated school staff and enrolled students would distribute and accept voter registration applications. The bill would mandate that such activities take place at least twice per school year, and require the distribution of a voter registration applications to each student, based on their age, and each school employee. The bill would further allow the State Board of Elections to adopt regulations governing the training of school personnel. MABE has serious concerns about the breadth and scope of this mandated voter registration system envisioned by this bill, and the potential disruption throughout multiple school days during the school year.

MABE is aware of amendments to streamline the bill as described above, including amendments to limit the required voter registration event to once per year, on or before the fourth Tuesday of September. However, to the extent the bill would continue to mandate activities involving all students and all staff within a given high school, including the distribution of voter registration applications to each classroom, MABE remains very concerned with the scope of the bill's potential impact on school administration and instruction. Similarly, MABE is concerned about the provisions providing local boards of election with broad discretion and control over the designation of space in which to conduct the voter registration drive.

In light of these concerns, MABE looks forward to continued dialogue on how to craft statewide legislation to facilitate the in-school voter registration of eligible high school students who choose to do so. However, pending the development of amendments to fully address the concerns outlined above, MABE requests an unfavorable report on House Bill 423.