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BILL: House Bill 437
TITLE: County Boards of Education - School Year - Start and End Dates
POSITION: SUPPORT
DATE: February 14, 2019
COMMITTEE: Ways and Means Committee
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The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) supports House Bill 437 because it would provide much needed flexibility for local school systems to adopt annual school calendars. This bill represents one of MABE's top legislative priorities for the 2019 session regarding local board governance authority.

House Bill 437 will alleviate the barriers to local decision making on school calendars, by authorizing a local board of education to establish the annual school calendar including the first day of school and last day of school. In this way, this bill would greatly assist local boards in determining how to craft their entire local school calendars including holidays, professional development days, parent conferences, election days and other factors. Importantly, other factors include the local decision to start the school year before Labor Day to maximize the benefits to students of the learning gains they achieved in the previous school year. Such gains can erode over extended summer breaks, and negatively impact the progress students are able to make beginning on day one of the new school year.

MABE strongly and successfully opposed legislation for several years which would have prohibited public schools from opening before the day after Labor Day. MABE continues to support preserving and protecting the rights of local communities and their respective boards of education to adopt school calendars; school calendars that reflect not only state testing schedules and mandated holidays, but also other important local considerations. Local boards serve a broad constituency of professional educators, parents, students, businesses and other community groups. Local boards believe that imposing a statewide start date for the school year would impose unwarranted restrictions on the prerogative of local communities to consider and decide on their local school system calendar.

On August 31, 2016 Governor Hogan signed an Executive Order mandating a post-Labor Day start for all of Maryland's public schools beginning in 2017. The Order further mandated that that school year end by June 15th. MABE objected to this initiative as contrary to the principle of local governance, and the traditional role of boards of education and their communities in setting school calendars. The State Board of Education responded to the first Executive Order by indicating its willingness to favorably consider waiver requests.

Then, on October 11, 2016, Governor Hogan issued a second, amended Executive Order to forestall the intention of the State Board of Education to consider and grant waivers from the post-Labor Day through June 15 school year based on a local board of education's showing that commencing their academic calendar before Labor Day would provide educational benefit to students. The second Executive Order repealed the previous waiver language, further restricting both local board and State Board discretion to allow for reasonable adjustments to school calendars.

Today, local boards of education confront a significant challenge to being able to make school calendar decisions in the best interests of student learning. On behalf of local boards, MABE strongly supports this legislation to restore to local boards the basic decision making authority to adopt their respective school calendars.

For these reasons, MABE urges a favorable report on House Bill 437.