

BILL: House Bill 53
TITLE: County Boards of Education - Length of School Year - Adjustments
DATE: February 14, 2019
POSITION: SUPPORT
COMMITTEE: Ways and Means 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 House Bill 53 because it would provide much needed flexibility for local school systems to adopt annual school calendars.

House Bill 53 will alleviate a significant barrier to local decision making on school calendars, by authorizing a local board of education to extend the school year for up to five days without approval from the State Board of Education. Importantly, the bill clarifies that no additional conditions may be placed on a local board's decision to adopt a calendar that does so. In these ways, this bill would greatly assist local boards in determining how to adjust their respective local school calendars.

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. Therefore, MABE supports removing unwarranted restrictions on the prerogative of local communities to consider and decide on their local school system calendars.

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 an extended school calendars.

For these reasons, MABE urges a favorable report on House Bill 53.