

BILL: House Bill 587
TITLE: Education – Public School Holidays – Veterans’ Day
POSITION: OPPOSE
DATE: February 21, 2019
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, opposes House Bill 587, which would require that all public schools be closed on Veterans’ Day.

First, MABE must emphasize the full support of local boards for appropriate recognition of Veterans’ Day and imparting to students the significance of the contributions and sacrifices of our veterans. Upon inquiring about this bill, MABE has learned that boards of education and our teachers greatly value the opportunity to have school on Veterans’ Day in order to do so.

Veterans’ Day presents a wonderful opportunity for educators and students to learn the history and significance of our national holiday honoring veterans. This history includes the establishment of November 11 as Armistice Day in 1918 following World War I (the “war to end all wars”), and the amendment of the name of this national holiday to become Veterans’ Day in 1954. Today, Veterans’ Day continues to be observed on November 11 in order to “honor America's veterans for their patriotism, love of country, and willingness to serve and sacrifice for the common good” (Veterans’ Administration).

MABE believes that by allowing schools to remain open, students are more likely to benefit from age appropriate school programs and instruction related to the history and meaning of Veterans’ Day than if schools are required to be closed. Importantly, whether a school system is open or closed on Veterans’ Day, students and families may explore and celebrate the meaning of Veterans’ Day on their own, and in their own ways, outside the school day. MABE believes these family activities will be enhanced, not hampered, by school programs in systems which choose to remain open on Veterans’ Day.

More broadly, MABE supports preserving and protecting the rights of local communities and their respective boards of education to adopt school calendars which must reflect not only state testing schedules and currently 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 preserving or expanding the flexibility to adopt school calendars rather than the more restrictive approach proposed by this bill to add another mandated holiday on which schools must be closed.

On August 31, 2016 and October 11, 2016 Governor Hogan signed Executive Orders mandating a post-Labor Day start date and end date on no later than June 15 for all of Maryland’s public schools beginning in 2017. The second Executive Order established more limited waiver criteria for the State Board of Education. For local school systems, the strict limitation of beginning school after Labor Day and ending school by June 15th has required significant changes to school calendars, and will continue to do so in future school years.

For these reasons, MABE requests an unfavorable report on House Bill 587.