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BILL: House Bill 727
TITLE: Public School Construction - Maryland Stadium Authority - Supplemental Funds
DATE: February 28, 2019
POSITION: SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS
COMMITTEE: Appropriations Committee
CONTACT: John R. Woolums, Esq.

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) supports House Bill 727 because it would launch a major school construction and renovation funding initiative through an alternative financing mechanism. However, MABE urges the adoption of amendments to ensure that school systems retain control over the design and construction of their school buildings.

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 State Lottery revenues beginning in FY 2021, with the proceeds to be used for much needed public school construction and renovation projects. This presents an exciting opportunity for a major expansion of the scope of the State's investment high quality learning environments for students and educators.

To be clear, MABE opposes similar legislation, House Bill 153, which would also authorize the Stadium Authority to issue up to \$1.8 billion in revenue bonds, but backed by annual payments of \$125 million from the Education Trust Fund and casino gambling revenues beginning in FY 2021. MABE opposes House Bill 153 because we firmly believe 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 greatly appreciates the major thrust of this legislation to create a new approach to generating the substantial bond revenue needed to build the new and improved schools Maryland's students deserve. 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 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 a favorable report on House Bill 727, with the amendments described above.