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BILL: Senate Bill 92
TITLE: Accountability in Education Act of 2019
DATE: February 6, 2019
POSITION: OPPOSE
COMMITTEE: Education, Health and Environmental Affairs 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 Senate Bill 92 to create a new state bureaucracy and the office of inspector general.

MABE supports strong accountability for school systems, both in terms of academic success for students and sound management of school finances and facilities. MABE assures the General Assembly that each local board places an extraordinarily high priority on investing the resources provided by taxpayers through federal, state and local funding allocations; investments in professional educators, administrators, and programs and services, and maintaining school facilities as safe and secure teaching and learning environments.

Local boards are fundamentally locally accountable to their communities, through public meetings, public and transparent policy and budget debates and decisions, and local elections. Similarly, accountability for student performance and success is the responsibility of each local board. However, this accountability is monitored, overseen, and enforced under laws such as the Open Meetings Act, Public Information Act, Whistleblower Protection Act, and School System Fiscal Accountability Act.

Central to the assurance of local school system accountability is the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) and State Board of Education. Virtually all local board decisions are appealable to the State Board, and the State Superintendent is empowered to oversee local compliance with state education laws, regulations and policies.

Regarding school finances, local school systems are held accountable for sound financial management through multiple independent audits of state and federal programs, such as special education, and the routine comprehensive performance audits conducted by the General Assembly's Office of Legislative Audits. School systems not complying with state requirements can have state funding withheld by the State Superintendent.

Regarding school facilities, virtually no significant school construction or renovation project may proceed without a rigorous review and approval process overseen by the Public School Construction Program and Interagency Committee on School Construction. Compliance oriented laws hold school systems accountable for prevailing wage, minority business enterprise and other state procurement laws, boiler safety, and all state and local building and fire codes.

Finally, subsequent to similar legislation being introduced and rejected last session, the Governor established the Office of Education Accountability in the Governor's Office for Children, and MSDE created the Office of Compliance and Monitoring and hired an Executive Director for the office. These actions only bolster MABE's position that this legislation is not needed to enhance accountability for public education in Maryland.

For these reasons, MABE requests an unfavorable report on Senate Bill 92.