

BILL: House Bill 783
TITLE: Task Force to Study Behavioral and Mental Health in Maryland
DATE: March 6, 2019
POSITION: SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS
COMMITTEE: Health and Government Operations 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 783 with an amendment. MABE greatly appreciates the importance of forming the proposed task force, and respectfully requests a seat at the table as a member of the task force. Clearly, the task force would be charged with many responsibilities relating directly to public schools, and MABE looks forward to contributing to the work as these critically important issues area addressed.

Specifically, the task force would be called on to:

- Consult with each local board of education's mental health services coordinator to define "mental health services" for each local board of education;
- Identify the number of full- and part-time school psychologists, school counselors, and school social workers working for each local board of education;
- Identify the ratio of students to school psychologists, counselors, and social workers in each county;
- Review best practices for treating immediate, short-term, and long-term behavioral and mental health issues in the State; and
- Identify successful behavioral and mental health initiatives in other states and recommend programs, tools, strategies, and funding sources needed to implement similar initiatives in the State.

MABE believes that these duties, among others, warrant adding a MABE representative on the task force. Therefore, MABE requests the addition of "A representative of the Maryland Association of Boards of Education, appointed by the Executive Director of the Association."

Regarding mental health services, all local boards of education place a very high priority on providing school-based health services and programs of instruction designed to promote the physical and mental health of students and to prepare them to maintain a healthy lifestyle as adults. Unfortunately, significant gaps exist in the access and availability of high quality, professional mental health services for students and families.

MABE recognizes the important role of the local school system's mental health services coordinator. MABE strongly supports the value of having an in-house professional responsible for making a concerted and ongoing effort to coordinate services under the school system's control, and to facilitate and verify that outside services are being provided. MABE is pleased that the Kirwan Commission legislation includes proposed funding to support the salaries of these vitally important and only recently mandated mental health service coordinator positions.

For these reasons, MABE requests that the committee issue a favorable report on House Bill 783 with the amendment described above.