

BILL: House Bill 1173
TITLE: Public Schools - Student Meal Programs and Meal Charge Policies
DATE: February 26, 2020
POSITION: OPPOSE
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 1173. MABE appreciates the intent to ensure the integrity and professionalism within the school meal programs administered across the State each school day on behalf nearly 1 million students. However, MABE believes the bill reflects an overly prescriptive and unsound approach to managing an already underfunded and overburdened sector of public education services.

MABE recognizes the importance of developing healthy school environments, which includes providing high quality health and physical education programs as well as meeting the nutritional needs of students through school breakfasts, lunches, afterschool meals, and vending machine policies. Therefore, MABE appreciates the intent of this legislation to ensure that school meals are provided in a professional manner to all students, regardless of free or reduced meal eligibility, or availability of money to purchase a meal on a given day. Local boards can assure the legislature that under Maryland's current school nutrition standards appropriately high standards are already in place.

For many years, local boards of education, superintendents, food service professionals, and the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), have been working collaboratively to adopt regulations and policies which exceed federal requirements. In recent years, MABE and local boards of education joined advocates for ending childhood hunger and promoting the health and learning of students, and supported legislation to provide funding to address the problem that many low-income students are not able to participate in the school meal programs because their household income is too high to qualify for free meals, yet too low to afford the reduced-price school meal co-pays.

In these ways, MABE supports ongoing state and local efforts to maintain a statewide system of school food services that serves the needs of all students, and in many cases before, during and after the school day. In this context, MABE does not support the imposition of the meal charge policy proposed in House Bill 1173, and requests an unfavorable report.