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BILL: Senate Bill 322
TITLE: Public Schools - Health Education - Gambling Dangers and Addiction
DATE: February 4, 2020
POSITION: OPPOSE
COMMITTEE: Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
CONTACT: John R. Woolums, Esq.

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) opposes Senate Bill 416 as introduced, and greatly appreciates the sponsor's efforts to address concerns through amendments.

This bill, as introduced, would require the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to develop a program of health education on the dangers of gambling and gambling addiction. This program would then be mandated to be provided in public schools in grades 6 through 12. MABE knows that amendments are being offered to reorient the bill to direct MSDE to develop the program but leave implementation of any changes in health instruction entirely up to local boards of education.

As this committee knows, MABE opposes efforts by the General Assembly to legislate curriculum, firmly believing that this role belongs to local boards of education in conjunction with the State Board. Therefore, MABE's opposition to this bill does not rest on an evaluation of the merits of teaching any specified subject matter, but rather the opposition to statutorily mandating the teaching of any one concept or content item.

In creating the State Board and local boards of education, the General Assembly has delegated to them the responsibility for developing curriculum and administering assessments. The State Board establishes State standards and statewide graduation requirements; the local boards implement locally-developed curriculum to ensure that standards are met and students are prepared to meet graduation requirements. State and local assessment programs ensure that all students, schools, and school systems are held accountable for their work.

Therefore, in the context of the recognizing the essential role of the state legislature in enacting laws which establish the framework for key elements of the State's approach to public education, MABE continues to support local decision-making authority in developing curriculum. As amended, this legislation would continue to impose a burden on MSDE to invest its limited resources to develop a new set of content standards in the area of student health. This subject area is presently under intense scrutiny by MSDE and the State Board due to a series of well-intended legislative mandates to add several specific content areas under student health. The High School Graduation Task Force has recommended that the State Board shift to a full credit requirement, but the State Board has not done so. In this context, MABE is particularly concerned about the State's capacity to continue to expand the scope of student health content standards at this time.

For these reasons, MABE requests an unfavorable report on Senate Bill 322.