

**BILL:** House Bill 496  
**TITLE:** Primary and Secondary Education – Mental Health Services – Expansion  
(Counselors Not Cops Act)  
**DATE:** February 3, 2021  
**POSITION:** OPPOSE  
**COMMITTEE:** Ways and Means  
**CONTACT:** John R. Woolums, Esq.

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE), representing all of the State’s boards of education, opposes House Bill 496, which would establish a new mental and behavioral health services grant program, eliminate the school resources officer grant program, and require extensive reporting requirements on school systems.

This bill would require each local board of education to submit reports on the ratio of students to staff members regarding school counselors; school psychologists; social workers; occupational therapists; speech pathologists; and other professionals. These reports would be required to include the ratios of students to each of these staff members at the school level and for the school system as a whole.

On behalf of all local boards, MABE is supporting the passage of the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future (HB 1300), comprehensive education reform legislation which proposes to mandate an unprecedented expansion planning, reporting, and accountability requirements on local school systems. These proposed requirements extend to staffing, instruction, curriculum, and many other facets of school system governance and administration. In this context, local boards of education are respectfully requesting that the General Assembly not adopt any additional reporting requirements.

MABE also opposes House Bill 496 because it would eliminate the State grants supporting many of the school resource officers (SROs) serving in schools across the State. Since 2018, these grants have assisted local governments in meeting the heightened expectations for school safety and the creation of a high quality SRO training program to ensure that these law enforcement officers perform their duties in accordance the school law and in the best interests of students.

In the 2021 session, MABE is supporting legislation, House Bill 522, to prohibit SROs from unilaterally enforcing discipline-related school policies, rules, regulations, or procedures to ensure that SROs do not make determinations regarding student discipline. This legislation is aligned with Maryland’s training program for SROs and therefore the policies and procedures that should already in place regarding the appropriate role of SROs as it relates to students, educators, and administrators, and student disciplinary actions.

The General Assembly is to be commended for the clear direction of the Safe to Learn Act of 2018 to develop a comprehensive curriculum for all SROs and any other designated school security personnel. The multi-faceted role of SRO’s is evident in the outline of the 40-hour, 5-day, mandatory curriculum for all SROs and school security staff.

- School Resource Officer: Definition & History of Role
- Memorandum of Agreement/Understanding (MOU) between the police department and the school

- Working Collaboratively with School Administration and Staff
- Restorative Practices in Schools: PBIS, School Based Mediation, and School to Prison Pipeline considerations and Implicit Bias
- Maintaining a Positive School Climate
- Victimization of Youth in Schools - Child Protective Services
- Informal Counseling Roles and Responsibilities
- Disability & Diversity Awareness with a focus on Inclusiveness and Cultural Fluency
- Implicit Bias
- Drug Education and Current Trends in Maryland Schools
- Investigation of Bullying, Threats & Social Media
- Principles of Effective Learning - The Expanding Role of an SRO as an Instructor
- Constructive Interactions with Students - Building Trust and Reducing Fear
- Collaboration and Problem Solving with Stakeholders
- Youth Development, Behavior and Discipline

MABE firmly believes that safety in public schools is the joint responsibility of local boards of education, school administrators and staff, students, parents and guardians, law enforcement and other public safety agencies, human services agencies, and the community in general. Therefore, we continue to urge federal, state, and local governments to ensure adequate and equitable funding for local public school safety and security programs, alternative education programs, and the wide array of behavioral health and public safety services provided by other public and private entities. MABE believes that this holistic approach is essential to maintaining safe schools and access to a high quality education for all of Maryland's students.

For these reasons, MABE requests an unfavorable report on House Bill 496.