

BILL: Senate Bill 852
TITLE: Education - County Boards of Education - Health Educator Position
DATE: March 8, 2022
POSITION: OPPOSE
COMMITTEE: Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs
CONTACT: John R. Woolums, Esq.

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) opposes Senate Bill 852, which would mandate that each county board of education create and fund a “health educator position” within the school system.

MABE generally opposes efforts by the General Assembly to legislate the state-wide creation of positions in local school systems, especially without additional adequate funding to secure those positions. MABE’s opposition to this bill does not rest on an evaluation of the merits of creating any specified position within a local school system, certainly not that of a staff person responsible for overseeing the ever-expanding realm of health education. Rather, MABE generally opposes statutorily mandating the universal creation of positions across all local jurisdictions.

In 2021, the State Board of Education adopted regulations based on the recommendations of the High School Graduation Task Force to increase the number of credits required for graduation from 21 to 22; a decision based in on the decisions to increase the number of credits in mathematics from three to four, and to increase in the number of credits in health education from one-half to one. The doubling of the mandated instruction in health education was necessitated by the dramatic increase in health education issues, including content focused on the opioid epidemic, sexual abuse assault instruction, suicide prevention, and mental health. As this Committee knows, MABE advocates that legislation addressing specific student health policy and services issues such as diabetes, opioid addiction, allergies, medical cannabis, and other chronic and acute conditions reflect the input of school health professionals and the consideration of available staff and resources. These same concerns apply to the proposal to mandate the designation of a new school system-wide position of health educator.

For the past two 2 years the pandemic has presented enormous challenges in meeting the physical and mental health needs of students, requiring major changes in school meal programs, responses to the trauma caused by the economic, health, and educational impacts of the pandemic. In addition, the pandemic is imposing extraordinary burdens on school personnel to conduct contact tracing and other services related to the safe reopening and operation of schools.

MABE believes it is critical that state and local budgets recognize these burdens and the associated costs. Local boards recognize the state role in governing student and school health issues through laws and regulations and advocates that such requirements not be overly prescriptive, costly, or burdensome.

For these reasons, MABE requests an unfavorable report on Senate Bill 852.