



MABE's Advocacy Primer
A Guide to Successful Advocacy
by Local Board Members
for Public Education
in Maryland

Presented by
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MABE's Mission



MABE's mission is to provide members with a strong collective voice, and to support local school board governance through professional development, advocacy, and member services.

MABE Programs & Services

- **Professional Development** – MABE provides the skills and knowledge required for our members to become effective leaders.
- **Legal and Policy Services** – MABE provides legal assistance, including amicus briefs, and policy training and alerts.
- **Insurance Programs** – MABE manages two member owned Trusts, set up to handle Property/Casualty and Workers' Compensation Pooled Self-Insurance.
- **Advocacy** – MABE represents all 24 local boards on legislative and regulatory matters before the General Assembly, State Board, and federal government.

Advocacy at the State Level

- The unity of 24 local school boards lends strength to our increasing importance in the legislative process, ensuring that the Governor and General Assembly turn to MABE to help determine what is best for school children.

MABE's Role in Annapolis

- Overall, approximately 350-400 of the 2500-3000 bills introduced each year pertain to public elementary and secondary education.
- Of these education-related bills, MABE typically submits written testimony on more than 100 bills and provides oral testimony on 60-75 of those.

A Comprehensive Approach

- I. Becoming an advocate
 - Informed on the issues
 - Knowing the policy makers
 - Using what you know with who you know = Advocacy
- II. Advocacy tools
- III. Advocacy at the local level
- IV. Advocacy at the state level
- V. Advocacy at the federal level

Being an Informed Advocate

“Lobbying” can be defined as an organized attempt to influence decision-makers on a particular issue.

Therefore, a critical first step in effective advocacy is “getting organized” by becoming more informed about both the policy issues and the policy-making process.

The Advocacy Challenge

Learn how to become an informed advocate without being overwhelmed and/or too intimidated by what you *don't* know to act on what you *do*.

Board Members as Influence Leaders

- Grass Tops – not Grass Roots
- Board members are more aptly described as “Grass Tops” advocates because they are members of boards and organizations with a prominent professional and/or public profile, are part of the political landscape among other decision makers, and can raise public attention or influence decision makers through established connections.
- Grass Tops advocates can reinforce grassroots advocacy and actions, but always in relation to their primary role as public officials.

A Note on Keeping “In Role”

- Always be sure that your advocacy efforts conform to your local board’s positions, policies, and practices.

Myth: I can speak and write as a private citizen about school issues.

Be very careful if you think you can continue to speak or write as a private citizen on school issues once you are a board member. Even if you just sign a letter to the editor or an opinion piece with your name and town address (usually required for publication) the news/social media will pick up on who you are.

- Your school system may have a policy that outlines who may speak for the board. Usually that is the board president/chair, but it can be a board member who has been designated.

MABE Resources

On most issues, you should have the benefit of testimony, talking points, articles, and other information prepared by MABE.

- ✓ Stay current with MABE
- ✓ Insist that MABE stay current
- ✓ Use, critique, and help improve MABE's materials

MABE In-House Publications

MABE provides the following electronic publications to keep members informed on legislative and regulatory matters:

- *The Education Advocate*: a legislative report provided regularly during the General Assembly's legislative session.
- *The Monitor*: a summary of the Maryland State Board of Education's monthly meeting.

MABE Advocacy Resources

The Advocacy section of MABE's website (www.mabe.org) has a wealth of information pertaining to the General Assembly, Maryland State Board of Education, and federal issues:

- ✓ Legislative Positions & Priorities
- ✓ Priority Issues & Updates
- ✓ Bill testimony and correspondence
- ✓ The *Education Advocate* & Calls to Action
- ✓ Legislative session summaries
- ✓ Presentations on priority issues

The Education Advocate

- MABE's Legislative Newsletter
- Updates on priority issues
- Calls to Action including:
 - Talking Points
 - Sample letters
 - Direct email links and phone numbers

Advocacy During Session

- Members of the General Assembly
- Delegations
- House & Senate Leadership
- Committees & Subcommittees
- Members & Committee Staff
- The Governor, State Superintendent, and Staff

The General Assembly

- 141 Delegates, 47 Senators
- 90-day regular legislative sessions
(Noon on the 2nd Wednesday in January through midnight on the 2nd Monday in April)
- The House Speaker and Senate President assign all committee chairs and vice-chairs
- Committee Chairs name subcommittee chairs, schedule bill hearings and votes
- Committee hearings, but not voting sessions, are printed in the hearing schedule
- All bills get a hearing, but not necessarily a vote

General Assembly Resources

The Maryland General Assembly's website (mgaleg.maryland.gov) is an excellent resource for session information, legislator contact information, House and Senate agendas and procedures, hearing schedules, and information on bill status.



The screenshot shows the Maryland General Assembly website. At the top left is the state seal. The main header reads "MARYLAND GENERAL ASSEMBLY". To the right is a search bar with the text "Search i.e. Bill search, keywo". Below the header is a red navigation bar with links for MEMBERS, COMMITTEES, MEETINGS, LEGISLATION, BUDGET, LAWS, and FLOOR. The main content area features a large banner with the text "MARYLAND GENERAL ASSEMBLY ANNOUNCEMENT" and "Congressional and Legislative Redistricting Information". Below this is a link: "Click the link above to view redistricting information". At the bottom of the banner is a yellow bar with the text "Session Information". On the right side, there is a vertical list of links: Sw, Ant, 202, Inte, Issu, Cor, Info.

How a Bill Becomes a Law

At the request of legislators, bills are drafted by the Department of Legislative Services (DLS).

A bill must be confined to a single subject (the “one subject rule”).

First Reading consists of the clerk reading the bill title and assignment to committee.

Committees hold hearings and may vote favorable, favorable with amendments, unfavorable, or not at all.

Four Committees in Focus

House:

- Ways and Means (policy)
- Appropriations (budget & policy)

Senate:

- Education, Energy and the Environment (policy)
- Budget & Taxation (budget & policy)

Tools You Can Use

Again, board members are “influence leaders” who have the capacity to be highly effective advocates.

What tools are available to craft your advocacy messages?

- MABE testimony
- MABE’s Legislative Positions publication
- MABE materials: talking points, slides, etc.
- Bills and Fiscal Notes (if available)
- Video of bill hearings

Tips for Effective Advocacy

- Keep it simple – most issues can be explained, and a position stated, in only a few sentences.
- Use the tool that works for you – call, write a letter, email, or schedule a meeting.
- Speak up to be heard on key public education issues – actions and inactions count.
- Set priorities – when everything is important, nothing is important.
- Be direct – make specific requests for specific positions and actions.

Talking to the Votes

Regularly contacting legislators and developing a relationship with them assists them in making well-informed decisions regarding education.

Ideally, legislators will reciprocate by seeking your input as issues are being considered.

Make a Phone Call

Phone calls are an effective and fast way to communicate with a legislator, especially when a critical vote is coming up.

Sometimes an in-depth conversation with a legislator is possible; at other times, a call may simply be tallied by staff.

Be sure to let staff know you are a board member, as the legislator may take your call.

When Making a Call ...

Ask to speak with the senator or representative, but be prepared to discuss the issue with staff.

Give your name, title, and the name of the school board on which you serve.

Focus the call on one issue or bill.

Briefly state the position you wish the legislator to take, ask the member's position, and be prepared to offer a rationale based on local impact.

Offer to meet, or to have MABE follow-up.

Schedule a Meeting

Meeting in person with a legislator, member of the state board, or key staff person, is the most effective way to share your position and influence legislation and policy making.

Call MABE's office to advise that a meeting has been scheduled, as there are often details and background information that MABE can provide.

Share outcomes & impressions.

Note: Always offer to meet in the district.

Use Social Media Wisely

- Social media can be effective.
- Examples include: Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.
- Explore and learn from what others are doing.
- Social media can provide a platform, portal or forum.
- MABE on Twitter:
 - [John Woolums \(@mabegov\) | Twitter](#)
 - [MD School Boards \(@MABE_News\) | Twitter](#)

Responding to MABE's Calls to Action

- ✓ Call
- ✓ Email
- ✓ Post on Social Media
- ✓ Spread the word – “Grass Tops” Advocacy
- Always provide the topic, bill number, and pro or con position!

Testifying Before a Committee

Committee hearings are an integral part of the legislative process in Annapolis.

Those testifying are typically given three minutes.

While formal training is not necessary in order to testify, there are many things that can be done to prepare which will strengthen testimony before a legislative committee.

Watching a Bill Hearing

Each bill hearing is streamed live, but also recorded and the video is linked from the bill's information page.

[Fiscal and Policy Note \(Revised\)](#) 

[Delegate Luedtke](#)

Bill File Type: Regular
Effective Date(s): July 1, 2019

[Ways and Means](#) 



You Can Do This!

Board Member Advocacy Goals:

Macro

- Being prepared to engage in advocacy on behalf of MABE, your school system, and public education.

Micro

- Being prepared for the elevator ride, email, text, social media post, phone call, or meeting – with legislators and staff – with other Grass Tops influencers – and with each other.

Thank you for this opportunity!

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