

BILL: House Bill 603
TITLE: Nonpublic Schools - School Health Services Program - Eligibility for Participation
DATE: February 22, 2023
POSITION: OPPOSE
COMMITTEE: Ways and Means
CONTACT: John R. Woolums, Esq.

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) opposes House Bill 603 which would create a new, costly taxpayer funded system to enable private school students to access student health services in public schools.

MABE opposes House Bill 603 because it would inappropriately divert \$4 million in public revenues to support a program in which public schools and staff would be engaged in providing basic school health services to private schools and their students. Maryland's public schools are already experiencing critical shortages of school health staff and therefore oppose creating a new program to extend those services to private schools and students.

MABE, on behalf of all local boards of education, has for many years opposed the establishment and continued funding of the Broadening Options and Opportunities for Students Today (BOOST) private school voucher program. Since 2016, the State Budget has provided millions of dollars in special funds from the Cigarette Restitution Fund to fund the BOOST private school voucher program established each year in the Budget Bill. MABE has consistently opposed legislation to further codify the establishment of the BOOST program, and based on the performance of this program and the competing priority of meaningful increases in State aid for public education, requests each year that the program should be removed from the State Budget. In 2016, the State Budget Bill was amended in conference committee to establish the \$5 million BOOST Program to provide vouchers for students who are eligible for the free or reduced-price lunch program to attend eligible nonpublic schools. To be eligible to participate in the BOOST program, a nonpublic school must participate in the Aid to Non-Public Schools Program for textbooks and computers administered by MSDE; and comply with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964; the State Government Article; and not discriminate in student admissions on the basis of race, color, national origin, or sexual orientation. House Bill 603 establishes similar parameters for a private school's participation in a public school student health services program.

MABE supports parental choice among the many public and non-public schools in the State. Maryland enjoys a wide array of educational opportunities for all of its students, including an outstanding public education system. Within the public school system, charter schools opportunities continue to grow. Outside the public schools, opportunities include parochial and non-sectarian private schools as well as home instruction. Local boards of education appreciate the important role that this mix of public and non-public schools plays throughout the state and in local communities. However, MABE believes that legislation goes too far when it proposes to create a state funded program to allow private and parochial schools to utilize public school student health services.

For these reasons, MABE requests an unfavorable report on House Bill 603.