

BILL: Senate Bill 809
TITLE: Education – Public School Employees – Parental Leave
DATE: March 2, 2023
POSITION: OPPOSE
COMMITTEE: Finance
CONTACT: John R. Woolums, Esq.

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) opposed Senate Bill 809, which would require school systems to establish paid parental leave program.

To the extent the bill is intended to mandate a new paid leave benefit, local school systems are opposed to the imposition of such a costly unfunded mandate. While the bill appears to make granting the request for paid parental leave a discretionary decision for local school systems, the bill would clearly mandate each local board to adopt policies and procedures for the new paid parental leave benefits program.

MABE appreciates the provisions to ensure that school systems remain responsible for the administration of this new parental leave benefit, but given the mandate to build this new benefits program, MABE believes local school systems will be expected to secure adequate funding to do so. Again, MABE is concerned that Senate Bill 809 will, ultimately, result in a significant unfunded employee benefits mandate for local school systems.

Maryland's local school systems are not granted taxing authority as are most school systems throughout the nation. Instead, each of the 24 local boards is fiscally dependent on the annual appropriations of state and county government funding. In this light, MABE consistently urges the legislature's serious consideration of the fiscal impacts of any new program or funding mandate on local school system budgets. The budgetary impacts of Senate Bill 809 would therefore not only present a challenge to school system budgets but also to the local government budgets that will be called on to meet the needs of their respective school systems.

Another important consideration for local school systems is the imperative for adequate numbers of highly qualified professional educators and other school-based staff during the school year. Maryland is coping with a severe teacher shortage while also working to implement the Blueprint for Maryland's Future. Local governments and school systems are, at present, engaged in negotiating and finalizing budgets to support the Blueprint, including the law's requirements for major reforms and increases in employee compensation and working conditions. Given these circumstances, MABE opposes adopting any newly expanded employee benefits program, including this legislation's paid parental leave program.

For these reasons, MABE requests an unfavorable report on Senate Bill 809.