

**BILL:** House Bill 204  
**TITLE:** Education - Coaches - Mental Health Training  
**DATE:** January 23, 2024  
**POSITION:** OPPOSE  
**COMMITTEE:** Appropriations and Ways and Means  
**CONTACT:** John R. Woolums, Esq.

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) opposes House Bill 204 based on serious concerns with a bill that would mandate that school systems not only adopt policies but also provide training to all coaches to recognize indicators of mental illness in students.

MABE opposes the unfunded and restrictive requirement to provide mental health training to all coaches as mandated by House Bill 204. In addition, the bill includes terminology, such as “mainstream athletics” that MABE believes should be conformed to references to interscholastic athletics, intramurals, and other school sponsored athletic programs. Lastly, MABE opposes the stand-alone nature of the mandate to train coaches, relative the provision of professional development for other school personnel. Professional development is essential, worthwhile, and expensive based on the unavoidable payroll expenditures for time allotted for the training. In this context, MABE strongly disagrees with the bill’s Fiscal and Policy Note which indicates only minimal costs to implement. The bill clearly presents an unfunded mandate.

Again, MABE supports and advocates for the essential staffing and resources necessary to meet the mental and behavioral health needs of our nearly 900,000 public school students. The benefits and value of access to high quality school-based mental and behavioral health services for students and families, teachers and staff, and communities at large can hardly be overstated. Prior to the pandemic, evidence was mounting that additional resources were needed to provide the holistic array of social, emotional, behavioral and academic supports for all students. Then the pandemic saw a dramatic rise in students reporting experiencing anxiety and depression and other symptoms. Today, students and staff are coping with these accumulated challenges in an environment of educator and other professional staffing shortages.

Importantly, the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future law addresses the needs to identify and respond to student mental health needs by establishing the Consortium on Coordinated Community Supports to build a statewide system of community based mental health providers and services accessible to all Maryland families and students. Specifically, the Blueprint requires local school systems to provide behavioral health training to certificated school personnel who have direct contact regularly with students and develop and implement a standardized screening to identify students with behavioral health service needs using an evidence-based approach. In these ways, the Blueprint recognizes that schools cannot meet student mental health needs without the services of qualified providers, and that systemwide tools are needed to identify students so that they and their families are connected with service providers.

Local boards of education, administrators, and staff place the highest priority on protecting our students’ physical and mental health and welfare while under our care and supervision. Therefore, MABE appreciates this bill’s intent to enhance the level of mental health training for coaches. However, for the reasons outlined above, MABE requests an unfavorable report on House Bill 204.