

BILL: House Bill 620
TITLE: Education - Sexual Abuse and Assault Awareness and Prevention Program - Human and Sex Trafficking
DATE: February 14, 2024
POSITION: OPPOSE
COMMITTEE: Ways and Means Committee
CONTACT: John R. Woolums, Esq.

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) opposes House Bill 620, which would require that the age-appropriate education program on the awareness and prevention of sexual abuse and assault developed and implemented by the State Board of Education and each nonpublic school would include, for students in grades 6 through 8, material promoting the awareness and prevention of human and sex trafficking.

MABE's opposition to this bill does not rest on an evaluation of the merits of teaching any specified subject matter, certainly not education about human trafficking, but rather on the association's opposition to statutorily mandating the teaching of any one concept or content item. The "Maryland Comprehensive Health Education Framework: Pre-Kindergarten through 12th Grade" (2021), includes the following instructional standards for students in 7th grade: "Analyze laws, policies, and consequences related to sexual mistreatment, grooming, harassment, abuse, assault, exploitation, and human trafficking that are designed to protect young people." This standard is then developed more fully at the high school level.

Local boards of education are committed to providing programs of instruction, health services, school facilities, and school meals designed to promote the physical and mental health and fitness of students and to prepare them to maintain a healthy lifestyle as adults. In this light, MABE appreciates the intent of this bill, but opposes adopting a specific student health instruction standard in this manner.

As this committee knows, MABE opposes efforts by the General Assembly to legislate curriculum, firmly believing that this role belongs to local boards of education in conjunction with the State Board. Although MABE agrees that human trafficking awareness and prevention education is a valuable component to comprehensive school health education programs, MABE maintains a strong preference for the adoption of State standards and the local discretion to achieve those standards through locally adopted curriculum and instructional tools and practices.

For these reasons, MABE requests an unfavorable report on House Bill 620.