

**BILL:** Senate Bill 552  
**TITLE:** Operating Budget - Funding - Scholarships for Nonpublic School Students  
**DATE:** February 7, 2024  
**POSITION:** OPPOSE  
**COMMITTEE:** Budget and Taxation  
**CONTACT:** John R. Woolums, Esq.

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) opposes Senate Bill 552 to mandate increased funding for the Broadening Options and Opportunities for Students Today (BOOST) private school voucher program.

MABE opposes the operation and funding of the BOOST program, which inappropriately provides millions of dollars in special funds from the Cigarette Restitution Fund to support Maryland's private school voucher program. The program has never garnered support as a legislative initiative other than through the annual State Budget, where it was first established. 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.

Since then, the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) has been required to administer the voucher program, including through staff support for the BOOST Advisory Board. The Advisory Board's duties include reviewing and certifying the ranked list of applicants and determining the individual scholarship, or voucher, amounts. 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, retentions, or expulsions on the basis of race, color, national origin, sexual orientation, or gender identity or expression.

MABE and other public education advocates have consistently and successfully opposed legislation to further codify the establishment of the BOOST program. Further, based on the performance of this program and the competing priorities of meaningful increases in State aid for public education, MABE supports reducing and eliminating funding for the BOOST program from the State Budget. The FY 2024 State Budget provided \$8 million, and the FY 2025 Budget Bill (SB 360) proposes a funding amount of \$9 million. Again, MABE opposes the continued funding for the BOOST program and therefore strongly opposes the mandated funding increases proposed in this legislation.

For these reasons, MABE requests an unfavorable report on Senate Bill 552.