

BILL: Senate Bill 739
TITLE: Algorithmic Addiction Fund - Establishment
DATE: February 20, 2024
POSITION: SUPPORT
COMMITTEE: Finance
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The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) supports Senate Bill 739 to establish the Algorithmic Addiction Fund to retain any revenues received by the State relating to legal judgments or settlements against technology or social media companies. MABE supports establishing this fund as a repository of these potentially substantial funds and the clear direction to the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) to administer the fund in a manner targeted to benefit those most in need of services. Maryland's students and families will benefit significantly from the prevention and treatment services funded through this legislation if enacted.

MABE and all local boards place the highest priority on protecting our students' physical and mental health and welfare while under our care and supervision, and therefore appreciate this bill's intent to secure and invest revenues from litigation to benefit all Marylanders, and most certainly Maryland's youth and their families, harmed by algorithmic addiction through the use of social media, and suffering its detrimental mental and behavioral health effects.

Local boards of education strongly support and advocate 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. Fortunately, Maryland is building a statewide Consortium of Coordinated Community Supports, an initiative enacted as part of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future, and designed to greatly enhance equitable access of all students and families to high quality community-based mental health services. MABE believes that the Algorithmic Addiction Fund, and the programs intended to be developed, would further advance the unprecedented amount of collaboration between the public health and public education spheres.

Again, MABE supports Senate Bill 739 to target additional resources to support the lead role of MDH in designing public health programs that will assist school systems in meeting the needs of our students, families, and communities. MABE believes that this legislation will work to advance the State's public policy and funding commitment toward educating students and families about the risks of algorithmic addiction and toward developing programs to prevent and respond to the harm it causes.

For these reasons, MABE urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 739.