

BILL: Senate Bill 1091
TITLE: Education - Blind and Visually Impaired Students - Textbook Equity
POSITION: SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS
DATE: February 23, 2024
COMMITTEE: Education, Energy, and the Environment
CONTACT: John R. Woolums, Esq.

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) supports Senate Bill 1091 to ensure accessibility for vision-impaired students to textbooks and other instructional materials. To be clear, MABE firmly believes that school systems are providing the access called for in this legislation. However, if the legislature believes that greater assurances are needed to guarantee the timely availability of accessible textbooks, then passage of this legislation could advance that cause.

The amendment MABE has identified as needed in the bill relates specifically to the arbitrary and overly broad requirement that all textbooks be elected by January 15th of each year. Removing this provision would continue to drive the mission of the bill to have school systems, the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), and the Instructional Resources Center, collaborate to ensure the identification and production of accessible materials for all students. Specifically, MABE requests an amendment to strike lines 10 through 12 on page 4 of the bill.

MABE joins all local school systems in the commitment to each student, regardless of disability, having access to challenging instruction from highly qualified professionals that addresses their unique learning needs and differences. Clearly, access to materials that have been converted to formats including Braille and large print makes sense as integral to the learning potential of students with vision challenges.

For this reason, MABE supports the passage of this legislation, with the amendment described above.