

Department of Legislative Services  
Maryland General Assembly  
2014 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

House Bill 51  
Ways and Means

(Delegate Cardin)

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**Public Schools - Boards of Education - Bullying Hotlines and Tip Boxes**

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This bill requires each local board of education to establish a toll-free bullying hotline for students and specified adults to report acts of bullying, harassment, or intimidation. Each local board of education must also distribute to each public school a tip box to allow for anonymous reporting of an incident of bullying, harassment, or intimidation. The local board must publicize the hotline and the tip boxes in student handbooks, school system websites, and other appropriate venues. On receipt of a report from the hotline or tip boxes, a standard victim of harassment or intimidation report form must be completed. The information received through a hotline or tip box is confidential and may not be part of a student's permanent educational record. The State Board of Education must include information regarding the availability and use of the hotline and tip boxes in its model policy prohibiting bullying, harassment, and intimidation in schools.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2014.

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**Fiscal Summary**

**State Effect:** None. It is assumed that the State Board of Education can modify the model policy with existing resources.

**Local Effect:** It is assumed that any costs associated with establishing and monitoring a toll-free bullying hotline and tip boxes can be absorbed in local school system budgets.

**Small Business Effect:** None.

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## Analysis

**Current Law:** The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) must require each local board of education to report incidents of harassment or intimidation against public school students that occur on public school property, at school activities or events, or on school buses. An incident of harassment or intimidation may be reported by a student or the parent, guardian, or close adult relative of a student. MSDE was required to develop a standard Victim of Harassment or Intimidation Report Form that includes specific information about an incident, and local boards of education must distribute copies of the forms to each public school. Local boards must submit completed forms to the State Board of Education, and MSDE must report annually on the forms received.

Chapter 489 of 2008 required the State Board of Education to develop a model policy that prohibits bullying, harassment, and intimidation in schools. Using the model policy, local boards of education were required to develop policies for the public schools under their jurisdiction.

In addition to a definition of bullying, harassment, or intimidation and a rule prohibiting bullying and retaliation against individuals who report acts of bullying, the model policy developed by the State Board of Education was required to include procedures for reporting bullying, investigating reports of bullying, and disciplining students who have violated school bullying policies. The model policy also includes information about the support services available to students involved in or witnessing bullying and information about the availability and use of the standard bullying report forms developed by MSDE.

Policies established by local boards of education were required to be developed in consultation with students, the parents and guardians of students, school personnel, school volunteers, and members of the community. A chain of command in the bullying reporting process has to be included in each local policy, along with the name and contact information for someone at MSDE who is familiar with bullying reporting and investigation procedures in the applicable school system. Copies of local policies must be included in student handbooks and posted on school system websites. A school employee who reports an act of bullying, harassment, or intimidation in accordance with the local board's policy is not civilly liable for any act or omission in reporting or failing to report an act of bullying, harassment, or intimidation.

In addition, local boards of education were required to develop educational programs for students, staff, volunteers, and parents as well as professional development programs that train teachers and administrators to implement the local policies.

**Background:** The American Psychological Association (APA) defines bullying as “aggressive behavior that is intended to cause harm or distress, occurs repeatedly over

time, and occurs in a relationship in which there is an imbalance of power or strength.” APA notes that individuals engaging in bullying behavior are generally more likely to exhibit other antisocial behaviors and that the victims of bullying often suffer from loneliness, insecurity, and thoughts of suicide. Various sources indicate that bullying incidents typically peak during middle school years.

To address and prevent bullying, Maryland adopted the Safe Schools Reporting Act of 2005 (Chapter 547), which requires a uniform reporting form to be available in public schools to victims of bullying and requires annual reports from MSDE on the incidence of harassment and intimidation. As shown in **Exhibit 1**, the rate of reported incidents per 1,000 students ranged from 2.1 in Harford County to 38.9 in Talbot County in the 2011-2012 school year; however, the report theorizes that the wide range in reporting rates is a result of greater levels of bullying awareness in some school systems and the varied means of distributing the reporting form in local school systems.

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**Exhibit 1**  
**Number of Reported Incidents of Harassment and Intimidation**  
**2011-2012 School Year**

<u>Local School System</u>	<u>Incidents per 1,000 Students</u>	<u>Local School System</u>	<u>Incidents per 1,000 Students</u>
Allegany	7.2	Harford	2.1
Anne Arundel	5.8	Howard	8.9
Baltimore City	7.5	Kent	37.0
Baltimore	4.4	Montgomery	3.5
Calvert	12.9	Prince George’s	2.6
Caroline	4.7	Queen Anne’s	9.1
Carroll	9.1	St. Mary’s	5.5
Cecil	15.4	Somerset	9.7
Charles	7.0	Talbot	38.9
Dorchester	14.4	Washington	8.0
Frederick	5.1	Wicomico	24.0
Garrett	5.6	Worcester	5.4

Source: Maryland State Department of Education

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In addition, the local school systems with the highest reported incident rates of bullying tend to have a lower overall enrollment. The 2011-2012 school year, the year reported in the 2013 report, marks the third year during which bullying prevention programming was required to be presented by the local school systems to students, staff, and volunteers. It

is speculated that the programming further heightened awareness of the issue among the school communities.

The National Parent-Teacher Association and APA report that the most effective bullying prevention strategies involve the entire school community. Both also recommend the integration of bullying-related content into school curricula and close adult supervision of students throughout the school day to monitor and prevent bullying behavior before it escalates.

**Local Expenditures:** It is assumed that any costs associated with establishing and monitoring a toll-free bullying hotline can be absorbed in local school system budgets. The cost of setting up a system will depend on the contract the local school system has with its telephone service provider, and the volume of calls to the hotline. If the volume of calls is high, there may also be additional costs associated with assigning someone to complete a standard victim of harassment or intimidation report form for each reported incident. Nevertheless, it is assumed this duty can be easily absorbed by existing personnel in most jurisdictions. In the State's largest jurisdictions, if two incidents per 1,000 students were reported via the hotline each year, the call volume would be one to two calls per day. However, in the State's smallest jurisdictions, the same incident rate would result in only five calls per year. Thus, local school systems' costs to establish and monitor a toll-free hotline will vary considerably. Local school system estimates for establishing a hotline range from existing resources to \$15,000 per year; however, it is assumed that any costs will be absorbed by local school system budgets. As a comparison, the statewide 24/7 gambling addiction hotline costs \$100,000 per year, which would be less than \$4,200 per jurisdiction.

It is assumed that the tip boxes can be installed and monitored using existing resources.

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### **Additional Information**

**Prior Introductions:** None.

**Cross File:** None.

**Information Source(s):** Maryland State Department of Education; Dorchester, Garrett, Howard, and Montgomery counties; American Psychological Association; Department of Legislative Services

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