



BILL: House Bill 119
TITLE: County Boards of Education – Curriculum Guides and Courses of Study - Requirements
HEARING DATE: March 29, 2023
POSITION: OPPOSE
COMMITTEE: Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
CONTACT: Ms. Patricia Ursprung, Deputy Legal Counsel (301-766-2946)

The Washington County Board of Education (WCBOE) opposes House Bill 119 (HB119), which would give unprecedented power to the State Superintendent of Schools (State Superintendent) as it concerns the curriculum taught in schools.

Originally introduced as a means to ensure local school systems adopt and teach a health curriculum that complies with the state-approved guidelines, HB 119 has been drastically amended to be a total state takeover of all curricular frameworks, standards, and instructional materials. The amended bill now mandates that local school systems follow “every element of the policy and guidelines for the program of instruction” for public schools established by the State Board of Education (State Board). Further, the bill requires that “all curriculum guides, courses of study, resource materials and other teaching aids” be in accordance with the state policy and program of instruction adopted by the State Board and prohibits school systems from using a student opt-out that is done “in a manner that is not approved by the State Board.” Finally, it gives the State Superintendent the power to determine if a local school system is out of compliance with the state guidelines or opt-out provision and, if so, withhold up to 20% of the school system’s funding until the error is corrected to his or her satisfaction. There is no appeal or review process. The State Superintendent has the first and final word on a local school system’s compliance.

The State Board issued a statement opposing the bill in its amended form, stating that the bill is unnecessary in light of the powers already granted by state law to the State Board and the State Superintendent and expressing its concern that the bill could harm the current collaborative relationship between the state and local education agencies.

Maryland’s education system has long-favored granting local boards of education control over local matters. The amended bill would remove a local board’s autonomy and ability to determine the most effective way to present the state-approved curriculum in its jurisdiction.

In light of this proposed change to the status quo, WCBOE concurs with the State Board and shares its concern that HB 119, in its amended form, could negatively impact the relationship between the State Board or State Superintendent and local boards of education. The bill as amended, has the ability to turn what is currently a collaborative relationship between the local boards of education and the State Board or State Superintendent into a combative one and one where only a single voice matters, that of the State Superintendent.

WCBOE urges this committee to issue an unfavorable report on HB119 so that local boards of education can retain local control and decision-making power over matters directly impacting its school system, and the children educated therein, while maintaining its relationship with the State Board and State Superintendent that is the cornerstone of the education system in Maryland.

Thank you.

cc: Washington County Board of Education Members
Washington County Delegation to the Maryland General Assembly
Dr. David T. Sovine, Superintendent
Dr. Jennifer Webster, Associate Superintendent for Administration and Leadership
Dr. Gary Willow, Associate Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction
Mr. Jeffrey Proulx, Chief Operating Officer
Ms. Ilissa Ramm, Chief Legal Counsel
Mr. John Woolums, Director of Governmental Relations, Maryland Association of Boards of Education
Ms. Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director, Public School Superintendents' Association of Maryland