

Members of the Senate,

I am writing to oppose a bill that promotes the callous bullying, extortion and coercion that the State Superintendent of Schools Mohammad Choudhury is conspiring to commit against the 24 local school boards and systems of Maryland.

In a meeting held recently regarding HB 119, the Comprehensive Health and Sex Education Framework, Delegate Atterbeary discussed how the bill is getting strong pushback from local systems and state legislators since there has never been a curriculum mandated by the State of Maryland through the legislature in the history of the state. Delegate Atterbeary started out saying, "House Bill 119, as amended, strikes the bill in entirety and replaces the bill basically with a scheme that punishes bad actors essentially. It requires each school board or local jurisdiction to follow the Health and Education Framework put out by the State Superintendent and the State Department of Education. If the State Superintendent determines that they are not following that, then they will receive a notice to come into compliance. If they do not come into compliance in thirty days, the State Superintendent can request that the Comptroller send a notice saying that 'If you do not come into compliance, we shall withhold ten percent of funding to your county.' "

"And then, if they do not comply within sixty days the same process and ten more percent can be withheld."

The twenty percent that would be withheld would cripple most districts, cause teachers and staff to lose paychecks, and hurt the children in those schools.

The Delegate then described that counties could get their funding returned if they comply with the Health and Education Framework.

She then described that the State Superintendent would be the sole arbiter of whether the county was abiding by state curricular guidance in ANY content and could withhold funding. This was explained as not being just directed to the Health and Education framework but would apply to adopting any State Curricular guidance from the Maryland State Department of Education and the State Superintendent. The name of the bill was changed to "County Boards of Education- Curriculum Guides and Courses of Study-Requirements."

It was also stated that the name and intent of the bill as well as the amendments were suggested by the current Superintendent Choudhury because of his frustration that Boards of Education across the state are not meeting his authoritarian demands as to the adoption of the State Health Education Framework.

While explaining this, Delegate Atterbeary misrepresented the participation of staff members from different counties on the creation of the Health and Sex Education Framework as an implicit agreement to adopt that framework. As someone who worked in education for over thirty years, I know this is not true. Counties send staff to participate in these developments to get some input on different sections of a framework, not the entire document. Most of the time, individual county reps don't even know what is in the entire document. Unless there was a roll call vote of school boards in each county, there is no agreement to adopt the curriculum. The Delegate lied.

The suggested amendment and subsequent actions by the State Superintendent are unprecedented when it comes to the adoption of curriculum by school systems. Although money has been withheld from counties before for missing deadlines for data or other administrative duties, this drastic action has never been implemented to coerce local Boards of Education to implement state curriculum.

County School Boards are elected entities who serve their local population, not the bureaucracy of the State Department of Education nor the whims of the State Superintendent. They should not be extorted to do so. It is severe enough that counties are under the authority of the Accountability and Implementation Board for the Blueprint initiative where they must comply and meet checkpoints or have 25% of funds cut from their budgets. This amendment would subject local education entities to requirements that mimic those implemented in countries under dictatorial rule. There would be no room for local choices that would better address the needs of their communities.

I see this as not only as an overreach of State government, but a new precedent that will eliminate the voices of parents and citizens in the counties of Maryland and nullify the electoral process they follow to choose their education representatives on their Boards of Education. With the Accountability and Implementation Board in the Blueprint for Maryland's Future and the State Superintendent deciding local issues in schools, the need for elected boards will be destroyed and the voice of the people silenced.

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education, Superintendent's Association, and even the State Board of Education oppose this bill as do many school systems. Their input plus the inputs of parents and citizens across the state cannot be ignored.

Local Boards of Education are the people we elect to design our programs in our district. We trust them to do that. If we disagree with them, we can meet with them. This is not the same with an authoritarian system as promoted by Superintendent Choudhury. He obviously does not agree in local decision making and is very upset when people disagree with him.

Sincerely,

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