



TO: The Honorable Vanessa E. Atterbeary, Chair
Members, House Ways and Means Committee

FROM: Pamela Metz Kasemeyer
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DATE: February 1, 2023

RE: **SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENT** – House Bill 119 – *Primary and Secondary Education – Comprehensive Health Education Framework – Established*

The Maryland Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (MDAAP) is a statewide association representing more than 1,100 pediatricians and allied pediatric and adolescent healthcare practitioners in the State and is a strong and established advocate promoting the health and safety of all the children we serve. On behalf of MDAAP, we submit this letter of **support with amendment** for House Bill 119.

MDAAP is very supportive of the objectives of House Bill 119, which would require the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), in consultation with the Maryland Department of Health, to develop a comprehensive health education framework. The bill specifies that the framework shall at a minimum include a number of topics which are critical to enhancing the awareness and understanding of youth about significant issues that could ultimately impact their health and well-being. These topics include: health promotion, mental and emotional health, substance abuse prevention, family life and human sexuality, gender identity and sexual orientation, safety and violence prevention, healthy eating, and disease prevention and control.

Based on the comprehensive framework developed by MSDE, House Bill 119 also requires each County Board to create an age-appropriate curriculum that is consistent with that framework. In developing its curriculum, the bill requires each County Board to establish a committee composed of educators, health experts, and members of the local community to review and comment on whether the curriculum materials are consistent with the comprehensive health education framework. To that end, MDAAP would request that the bill be amended to specifically specify that the health experts that will be serving on these committees specifically include pediatricians with expertise in both child and adolescent medicine.

MDAAP recognizes and supports the provision of comprehensive and age-appropriate health education in both primary and secondary schools. Many of the subject areas identified in the legislation reflect issues that all youth should be informed about and should have an opportunity to engage in better understanding their implications. Without comprehensive education programs in the schools, many students will not have an avenue to gain the education and insight that would be provided through the required curriculum. However, MDAAP does not support the “opt out” option afforded parents for family life and human sexuality and gender identity and sexual identity subject matters. These issues are some of the most complex and impactful on a child and adolescent’s physical and mental health well-being. Allowing parents to prevent their children from learning about these subject matters almost assures these children will not have access to critical information that may assist them in addressing these issues in their lives, with their peers, and in relationships with their families. MDAAP strongly urges the opt out provisions be deleted from the legislation.

With its amendments noted, MDAAP requests a favorable report.