

BILL: Senate Bill 426
TITLE: Education - Maryland STEM Program - Established
DATE: February 7, 2024
POSITION: OPPOSE
COMMITTEE: Education, Energy, and the Environment
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The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) opposes Senate Bill 426 because it would establish a new state-funded program for staffing instructional programs provided in nonpublic schools.

This bill would establish the Maryland STEM Program in the Maryland State Department to Education (MSDE) to provide additional compensation to a current or retired public school teacher to teach science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) classes at nonpublic schools. MABE does not doubt that there is a shortage of STEM teachers in private schools, because public schools are certainly experiencing the same phenomena. However, Maryland's constitutional mandate is for the Governor and legislature to establish and fund a thorough and efficient statewide system of free public schools. These public schools, 1,400 across 24 local school systems, are engaged in the transformative changes called for by the Blueprint for Maryland's Future. MABE opposes the expansion or creation of new state funding obligations to support nonpublic schools as proposed in Senate Bill 426 as Maryland is confronting forecasted fiscal challenges to sustain the Blueprint.

MABE greatly appreciates the State's commitment to enact the Blueprint and fund major systemic changes in the delivery of prekindergarten, the preparation of all students to be college and career ready, and significant salary increases and improvements in working conditions for teachers. But the Blueprint is still in its early stages of implementation, and the challenges to fulfill all of the Blueprint's promises are daunting. One of the most pressing challenges is to secure the state and local funding to increase staffing levels and sustain salary increases for teachers, principals, counselors, nurses, custodians, bus drivers, and the many other dedicated educational and support staff working in public schools.

MABE supports parental choice among the many public and non-public schools in the State. Maryland enjoys a wide array of educational opportunities for all of its students, including an outstanding public education system. Within the public school system, charter schools opportunities continue to grow. Outside the public schools, opportunities include parochial and non-sectarian private schools as well as home instruction. Local boards of education appreciate the important role that this mix of public and non-public schools plays throughout the state and in local communities. However, MABE believes that legislation goes too far when it proposes to create a state funded program to support the salaries of teachers at nonpublic schools. Again, MABE opposes Senate Bill 426 because it would inappropriately divert state funding, and the professional services of MSDE staff, away from public education and the mission to support Blueprint implementation.

For these reasons, MABE requests an unfavorable report on Senate Bill 426.