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Education, Energy, and
Environment Committee

Chair, Joint Committee on
Cybersecurity, Information Technology
and Biotechnology



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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony in Support of SB0981—Local Cybersecurity Preparedness and Local Cybersecurity Support Fund—Alterations

March 7, 2024

Chairman Feldman, Vice-Chair Kagan, and members of the Education, Energy, and Environment Committee:

Thank you for your consideration of Senate Bill 981 - Local Cybersecurity Preparedness and Local Cybersecurity Support Fund - Alterations, which ensures our local school systems have the tools and resources they need to meet minimum state cybersecurity standards.

The K12 Security Information Exchange estimates that there have been more than 1,330 publicly disclosed school cyber attacks since 2016. The risks of cybersecurity breaches cannot be overstated, as they jeopardize sensitive data, disrupt vital services, and inflict substantial financial losses. Here in Maryland, we had a cyberattack that targeted the Baltimore City Public School district in 2020, which ultimately incurred roughly \$10 million in recovery costs, and impeded access to remote learning for students.¹ This last August, Prince George’s County Public Schools experienced a cyberattack that hit its network servers, impacted about 4,500 district user accounts, and compromised data from 99,543 individuals.²

In 2022, we passed SB754 which required schools to do cybersecurity assessments. We found that schools are doing the best they can with limited resources. Thankfully, there are several high-return, low-cost investments that we can implement:

- 1) Multi-factor authentication (MFA):** Only 27% of all school employees, 20% of privileged users, and 8% of critical systems are currently using MFA, according to a district IT report provided by MSDE. MFA is typically included as a default feature in software, so mandating its use will incur no additional costs; however, the benefits of adding another layer of cyber defense are enormous.

¹ <https://abcnews.go.com/US/baltimore-schools-failed-fully-act-security-recommendations-cyber/story?id=96671802>

² <https://statescoop.com/maryland-schools-personal-data-cyberattack/>

- 2) **Increase Staffing** For 22 CSF/NIST Categories in the State Minimum Security Requirements, Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) pointed to staffing and skill set training as the biggest hindrance. The number one request to solve differences in asset management, risk assessment, risk management, data security, information protection processes, continuous monitoring, response planning and recovery – was staffing.
- 3) **Procure standard cybersecurity tools:** LEAs need to remediate priority technical solutions now that they have completed their vulnerability assessments. These include network monitoring systems and endpoint detection, as well as more unique problems.

SB0981 puts forth a proactive response to these pressing challenges by establishing a dedicated fund to bolster cybersecurity preparedness at the local level. Specifically, the bill will:

1. Increase funding in the local cyber fund, which can be used flexibly for IT improvements such as upgrading devices, procuring new systems, training, hiring, conducting assessments, etc.
2. Require school systems to do 3 things:
 - a. Establish MFA for school employees,
 - b. Implement endpoint detection, and
 - c. Implement network monitoring systems.
3. Provide sufficient human resources at the Department of Information Technology to provide shared Information Security Officers to support the schools short on staff.

By furnishing essential financial support to our local agencies, SB0981 will help to ensure that we are protecting the financial investment the state makes in our local school systems and the data of the students and employees remains as safe as possible

For these reasons, I respectfully request a favorable report on SB0981.

Sincerely,



Senator Katie Fry Hester
Howard and Montgomery Counties