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of Howard County**

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**Board of Education of Howard County
Testimony Submitted to the Maryland House of Delegates,
Ways and Means Committee
March 27, 2024**

SB1058: UNFAVORABLE

Education - Curriculum Standards - Antihate and Holocaust Education (Educate to Stop the Hate Act)

The Board of Education of Howard County (the Board) opposes **SB1058 Education - Curriculum Standards - Antihate and Holocaust Education (Educate to Stop the Hate Act)** as a mandate on local curriculum with unrealistic timelines for school systems to implement.

As amended by the Maryland Senate, SB1058 broadly encompasses curriculum development and school system requirements around the use of updated standards developed by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) for all subject levels. Initially, the bill defines content standards, curriculum resources, and curriculum standards. Content standards and curriculum standards must be reviewed and updated by MSDE at least every 8 years. Lastly, if a county board fails to establish curriculum resources and courses of study aligned with the content standards and curriculum standards developed by MSDE, the State Superintendent may withhold State funds.

These amendments have the effect of tipping the traditional balance between State oversight and local control over the delivery of education in Maryland to a one-sided authority. Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) staff read the definition of “curriculum standards” as the indicators and objectives found in the current [MSDE Social Studies Framework](#). While these are used as guidance at the local level, professional curriculum staff employed by HCPSS use their expertise to determine the best approach to teaching the broader subject requirements in a way that fits local needs. As a legislative platform the Board supports local decision making in the development of curriculum that accounts for a balance of educational practices, available resources, public input, and accountability that is informed and guided by State Board established standards and models, rather than legislative mandates to strictly follow every element of the guidelines established by the MSDE. Legislation which limits local board decision-making authority may weaken the Board’s bond with the local community and adversely impact the community’s participation in the governance and operation of the school system.

In the preamble to the bill, the sponsors address the fact that overreach into school system operations through legislation is not the norm, stating “WHEREAS, It is a policy of the General Assembly to avoid legislating the instruction of the public school system, but the unprecedented expressions of hate, bigotry, and prejudice have reached a critical and alarming mass requiring that the General Assembly take unprecedented policy action to best achieve outcomes for the people of the State.” While the Board agrees with the intent of SB1058 to ensure curriculum is well-rounded, the bill reflects a fundamental flaw in root cause analysis. Data around the rise of hate crimes can and should be tied to causes outside the control of schools.

Although moved to a one-time mandate within uncodified language of the bill, SB1058 as amended also still includes curriculum mandates for social studies at all grade levels to include specific focus on racism, prejudice, and the Holocaust. By the 2025-2026 school year, the General Assembly intends to have all county boards of education establish curriculum resources aligned with the new content standards and curriculum standards to be established.

While the extent is unable to be estimated, any changes to State standards after the mandated review by January 2025 will result in changes to local school system materials as well as time and resources involved in teacher preparation on the new content. HCPSS local curriculum staff are already inundated with changes from the current 10-year cycle of review by the State. The Grades 6 and 7 Social Studies Framework linked above, for instance, was just released this year. Staff also does not believe MSDE has the resources to do the mandated review within a six-month period, nor would local school systems be able to implement resulting changes within six months after MSDE adopts.

It is also unclear how some of the topics would be taught as specified. What type of standard would be written to address “torture” for instance? While curriculum might address historical actions of genocide and crimes against humanity, a standard that specifically outlines these topics is not reflective of best practices for either a culturally responsive or trauma informed classroom. While many of the topics outlined in the mandated review by MSDE are already taught in HCPSS, the bill removes local discretion. Adopting content standards for elementary school social studies for grades 4 and 5 to include instruction on the Holocaust within the grade 5 unit as called for in this section of the bill is not related to current MSDE objectives as it has not been identified as an age-appropriate topic at that grade level.

For these reasons, we urge an UNFAVORABLE report of SB1058 from this Committee.