

INFORMATIONAL
House Bill 795
Education – Curriculum Content Standards – Peace and Conflict Studies (Peace and Conflict Studies Education Act)

House Ways and Means Committee
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The Maryland State Education Association offers this informational testimony on House Bill 795, which would require the State Department of Education to develop curriculum content standards for a high school course on peace and conflict studies, require each county board of education to implement a course on peace and conflict studies in each public high school in the county, and require each public high school to hire a mediator to provide education and support to students and school personnel relating to conflict resolution and peaceful communications in resolving disputes.

MSEA represents 75,000 educators and school employees who work in Maryland's public schools, teaching and preparing our almost 900,000 students so they can pursue their dreams. MSEA also represents 39 local affiliates in every county across the state of Maryland, and our parent affiliate is the 3-million-member National Education Association (NEA).

MSEA tenaciously advocates for the policies and programs that will give our students access to the resources and knowledge they need to achieve their full potential, including around conflict resolution. However, MSEA has longstanding concerns about legislatively mandating curriculum, especially regarding the creation of new courses and units. We believe that it is the purview of the MSDE and the State Board of Education to develop and implement curriculum standards to meet the academic needs of the students served in Maryland's public schools. It is then the responsibility of local districts to determine how best to implement a program of study that best serves the needs of their students.

We appreciate the intent of this legislation. However, developing a new course raises concerns about the amount of coursework already required of high school students and puts pressure on student and staff schedules. Further, the requirement to hire a mediator for the course is likely to be a challenge for school systems, especially amid a statewide school personnel shortage. We believe that local boards and educators are best suited to determine how best to incorporate priority issues into current required course content.