



House Ways and Means Committee

January 29, 2025

House Bill 161 – *Primary and Secondary Education – Comprehensive Health Education Framework – Established*

POSITION: SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENT

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 161.

MDAAP strongly supports the objectives of House Bill 161, 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 inclusion of critical topics – such as 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 – will enhance students’ understanding of key issues impacting their health and well-being.

We recognize and support the importance of providing comprehensive, accurate, and age-appropriate health education. Many of the subjects identified in the legislation are essential to equipping youth with the knowledge and skills to navigate challenges and make informed decisions. Without such education programs in schools, many students will lack access to critical information and guidance.

However, MDAAP is concerned about the inclusion of “opt-out” provisions for family life and human sexuality education. These topics address some of the most complex and impactful issues affecting a child’s physical and mental health. Allowing parents to exempt their children from these lessons risks denying them access to critical, evidence-based information that could help them navigate personal relationships, understand their bodies, and develop healthy behaviors. This information is especially vital for addressing issues, such as preventing unintended pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections, and unsafe relationships.

We strongly urge the committee to remove the opt-out provisions from the legislation to ensure equitable access to this essential education for all students. With consideration of our amendment, we urge a favorable report.

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