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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
January 29, 2025

HB0161: UNFAVORABLE

Primary and Secondary Education - Comprehensive Health Education Framework – Established

The Board of Education of Howard County (the Board) opposes **HB0161 Primary and Secondary Education - Comprehensive Health Education Framework – Established** as a mandate on local school system curriculum.

HB0161 requires the Maryland State Department of Education, in consultation with the Maryland Department of Health, to develop a comprehensive Health Education framework that included topics currently found in the [Maryland Comprehensive Health Education Framework](#), which was last adopted by the Maryland State Board of Education (MSBE) in June 2021. The bill additionally calls on local boards of education to establish a committee composed of educators, health experts, and members of the local community to review and comment on consistency of local curriculum materials with the comprehensive health education framework. Local boards must also adopt policies, guidelines, and procedures for a parent or guardian to opt out of the Family Life and Human Sexuality unit. A local board could not authorize a parent or guardian to opt a student out of education related to HIV or AIDs prevention. Annually, local boards of education are required to report to MSDE on the actions taken to comply with the requirements of the bill.

While Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) health education staff and the Board support comprehensive instruction in Health Education and the intent of HB0161, and currently follow the Framework adopted by MSBE, preserving local control in the implementation of health curriculum is imperative. Consistent with this practice, MSDE is currently leading a Standards Framework Validation Committee, with the intention of deciding if the current Health Education Framework needs revisions. If the committee decides to open the document for revisions, it will go to public comment for feedback from education stakeholders.

HB0161 is also both redundant of, and contradictory to, current Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR). Families can opt out of the Family Life and Human Sexuality unit, which has course objectives about HIV and AIDs. There are also course objectives for HIV and AIDs in the Disease Prevention unit, which does not allow for a family to opt out.

As a legislative platform, the Board supports local decision-making in the development of curriculum and policy that account 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. Legislation that 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.

For these reasons, we urge an UNFAVORABLE report of HB0161 from this Committee.