



House Ways and Means Committee

February 11, 2026

House Bill 355 – *Education – Sexual Abuse and Assault Awareness and Prevention Program –
Human and Sex Trafficking*

POSITION: SUPPORT

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** for House Bill 355.

The bill requires the inclusion of human and sex trafficking awareness and prevention material in education programs for students in grades 6 through 8. Adolescents, particularly those in middle school, are highly vulnerable to trafficking, and early education on the signs of exploitation is crucial in empowering students to protect themselves and seek help. By integrating this content into school curricula, the bill ensures that students will have the knowledge and tools to recognize and report potential trafficking situations.

According to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, approximately one in six runaways reported to them in 2020 were likely to be victims of sex trafficking, with a significant portion of those victims being between the ages of 12 and 17 – an age range that overlaps with middle school-aged youth. Additionally, the Polaris Project, which operates the National Human Trafficking Hotline, reports that youth between the ages of 12 and 17 are particularly vulnerable to trafficking due to their increasing independence and the potential for online exploitation (National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, 2020; Polaris Project, 2021). These statistics highlight the urgent need for educational programs targeting middle school students to help prevent trafficking before it occurs. For these reasons we urge a favorable report.

For more information call:

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