



Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director
1217 S. Potomac Street
Baltimore, MD 21224
410-935-7281
marypat.fannon@pssam.org

BILL: HB 856

TITLE: Local Education Agencies - Educator Screening - Educator Identification Clearinghouse (School Personnel Vetting and Hiring Transparency Act)

DATE: February 25, 2026

POSITION: Favorable with Amendments

COMMITTEE: House Ways and Means Committee

CONTACT: Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director, PSSAM

The Public School Superintendents' Association of Maryland (PSSAM), on behalf of all twenty-four local school superintendents, **supports** House Bill 856 **with amendments**.

This bill requires the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to register each local school system (LSS) in the State as an associate member of a national membership organization that provides access to the Educator Identification Clearinghouse and to pay any applicable fees and dues associated with the membership. Each LSS must use the clearinghouse to screen individuals who receive an offer of employment for an educator position that requires a license. In addition, each local school system must ensure that each individual who receives such an offer (1) applies for the appropriate license after the offer of employment and before the start of employment and (2) obtains the appropriate license before any interaction with children. Nothing in the bill may be construed to impair or affect existing statutory prohibitions against hiring or retaining individuals convicted of specified crimes, including child sexual abuse.

Maryland school systems take their responsibility to ensure the safety of students and staff extremely seriously. We appreciate the bill's emphasis on strengthening student safety and reinforcing the integrity of the licensure process. In particular, we support the provision requiring candidates to apply for licensure at the time they receive an offer of employment. This requirement adds an important layer of screening and reinforces the shared commitment of school systems and the State to student protection.

A review of Maryland's 24 local school systems confirms that extensive safeguards are already in place, including existing federal and state mandates, including:

- State and FBI fingerprinting (criminal background checks and the Adam Walsh Background Clearance Request form, DHR/SSA 1279A)
- Form I-9 verification (paper and E-Verify where available)
- Md. Code, Educ. § 6-113.2 Child Sexual Abuse and Sexual Misconduct review (“HB 486 review”)
- Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) TEACH database review
- CJIS fingerprinting and background checks
- MSDE Disqualified Substitute List review
- Department of Social Services child abuse registry checks
- Maryland Judiciary Case Search inquiries, where applicable
- Internal database reviews
- Drug testing, where required
- Recruiting and tracking systems such as Workday, AppliTrack (Unified Talent/PowerSchool), TalentEd (PowerSchool), and Frontline
- Basic online screening and employment verification processes

These layers of review reflect a strong and proactive screening infrastructure across the State.

While we support the bill's intent, *we respectfully request a clarifying amendment to remove the language requiring a license to be fully issued before “any interaction with students.”*

Although well-intentioned, this provision could unintentionally create barriers for pre-screened, qualified educators whose paperwork is still being processed. In practice, licensure issuance can be delayed for reasons outside of a candidate's control, even when all safety screenings have been successfully completed. Removing this final clause, while retaining the requirement that candidates apply for licensure upon offer of employment, preserves the bill's important safety objectives while allowing reasonable operational flexibility during the hiring and licensure process.

Finally, we support an amendment to move the date from October 1, 2026 to August 1, 2026 by which local school systems must utilize the clearinghouse to screen individuals offered employment.

House Bill 856 builds upon current protections aimed at ensuring only qualified and appropriate individuals enter our classrooms. We recognize the bill's focus on student safety and maintaining the credibility of the licensure system.

Therefore, PSSAM **supports** House Bill 856 with the **amendments** outlined above.