

BILL: House Bill 856
TITLE: Local School Systems – Educator Screening – Educator Identification Clearinghouse (School Personnel Vetting and Hiring Transparency Act)
HEARING DATE: February 25, 2026
POSITION: SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENT
COMMITTEE: Ways and Means
CONTACT: Sam Mathias, Legal & Policy Director (smathias@mabe.org)

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE), representing all 24 local boards of education across the State, **supports House Bill 856.**

House Bill 856 requires that each local school system become an associate member of a national membership organization that provides access to the Educator Identification Clearinghouse to screen prospective educators. It requires the Maryland State Department of Education to pay for membership fees of all local school boards, and for local school boards to screen candidates through the Clearinghouse.

The Clearinghouse contemplated by this bill is the only known national database that includes records of administrative actions such as admonishments, suspensions, and license revocations issued in other states. It is designed to supplement, not replace, traditional criminal background checks. Because many educator misconduct cases are resolved administratively rather than through the criminal justice system, the Clearinghouse provides an additional safeguard to identify individuals who may pose a risk to students but would not be flagged through standard background screening.

Many Maryland school systems already use and pay for access to this Clearinghouse. Centralizing membership through the Maryland State Department of Education and having the state take on the cost to provide statewide access ensures consistent screening practices across jurisdictions and strengthens student safety protections. This approach is both practical and cost effective for local boards.

MABE appreciates the sponsors of this bill and its cross-file in the Senate, and their work with MSDE for refining the bill to create a workable statewide structure. While we fully support the bill's intent, ***MABE respectfully requests a clarifying amendment to remove the language making a local school system ensure that each individual who receives an offer to have a license 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, and certainly outside

of a local board's control, even when all safety screenings have been successfully cleared. Removing this final clause, while retaining the requirement that candidates apply for licensure upon offer of employment, preserve the bill's important safety objectives while allowing reasonable operational flexibility during the hiring and licensure process.

Otherwise, ***we support the sponsor's amendment to move the date from October 1, 2026 to August 1, 2026 by which local school systems must use the Clearinghouse to screen individuals offered employment.***

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