

Department of Legislative Services
 Maryland General Assembly
 2009 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

House Bill 478 (Delegate Rice, *et al.*)
 Health and Government Operations

Task Force on Public Health Risks Linked to Bullying

This bill establishes a Task Force on Public Health Risks Linked to Bullying. The task force must review bullying data and develop guidelines or make recommendations for the implementation of bullying prevention programs and the monitoring of the health and safety risks linked to bullying. The Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) must provide staff support for the task force. Interim reports are due by December 31, 2009 and December 31, 2010. A final report with findings and recommendations is due by December 31, 2011.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2009 and terminates June 30, 2012.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: General fund expenditures in DHMH increase an estimated \$54,600 in FY 2010 for contractual staff to support the task force and conduct the required review. This estimate assumes that contractual staff can be eliminated with completion of the final report. Future year expenditure estimates reflect inflation and a regular salary increase through December 2011. Revenues are not affected.

(in dollars)	FY 2010	FY 2011	FY 2012	FY 2013	FY 2014
Revenues	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
GF Expenditure	54,600	49,000	25,500	0	0
Net Effect	(\$54,600)	(\$49,000)	(\$25,500)	\$0	\$0

Note: () = decrease; GF = general funds; FF = federal funds; SF = special funds; - = indeterminate effect

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: None

Analysis

Bill Summary: The task force is charged with:

- reviewing the 2005, 2007, and 2009 Maryland Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data;
- reviewing the published studies about the health and safety risks linked to bullying and strategies for bullying prevention; and
- developing guidelines or making recommendations for the implementation of bullying prevention programs and the monitoring of the health and safety risks linked to bullying.

Task force members may not receive compensation but are entitled to reimbursement for expenses under the standard State travel regulations, as provided in the State budget.

Background: The American Psychological Association (APA) defines bullying as “aggressive behavior that is intended to cause harm or distress, occurs repeatedly over time, and occurs in a relationship in which there is an imbalance of power or strength.” APA notes that individuals engaging in bullying behavior are generally more likely to exhibit other antisocial behaviors and that the victims of bullying often suffer from loneliness, insecurity, and thoughts of suicide. Various sources indicate that bullying incidents typically peak during middle school years.

An article in *State Legislatures* magazine on bullying notes that 39 states have enacted legislation to address and prevent bullying. For example, Maryland adopted the Safe Schools Reporting Act of 2005 (Chapter 547), which requires a uniform reporting form to be available in public schools to victims of bullying and requires annual reports from the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) on the incidence of harassment and intimidation. As a result of Chapter 547, MSDE compiled forms describing 1,470 incidents of harassment and intimidation reported during the 2006-2007 school year. In the 2008 report, the rate of reported incidents per 1,000 students ranged from 0.0 in Kent County to 12.7 in Wicomico County. Because the rates are higher for some of the school systems that have implemented systemwide and schoolwide programs on bullying prevention, the report theorizes that the wide range in reporting rates is largely the result of greater levels of bullying awareness in some school systems.

With the access that children and adolescents now have to technology, accounts of “cyberbullying” – using technology such as the Internet, e-mail, text messages, or instant messages to torment others – have become more frequent. The National Conference of

State Legislatures (NCSL) notes that “cyberbullying differs from the more traditional forms of bullying in that it can occur at any time, ... and perpetrators can remain anonymous.” In addition, school responses to cyberbullying are sometimes problematic because, although the victims and perpetrators may be schoolmates, the acts typically do not take place on school grounds. The National Parent Teacher Association and APA report that the most effective bullying prevention strategies involve the entire school community. Both also recommend the integration of bullying-related content into school curricula and close adult supervision of students throughout the school day to monitor and prevent bullying behavior before it escalates.

State Expenditures: General fund expenditures increase by an estimated \$54,571 in fiscal 2010. The estimate reflects the cost of hiring one contractual health policy analyst in July 2010 to support the task force. A salary, fringe benefits, and operating expenses are included in the estimate. Additional staff is required because given the State’s fiscal difficulties, agency budgets have been constrained and there are complex financial, legal, policy, and administrative issues involved with staffing this 21-member task force.

	<u>FY 2010</u>	<u>FY 2011</u>	<u>FY 2012</u>
Salary and Fringe Benefits	\$47,726	\$46,438	\$24,241
Start-up and Operating Expenses	6,845	2,535	1,280
Total State Expenditures	\$54,571	\$48,973	\$25,521

Fiscal 2011 and 2012 expenditures reflect a contractual salary with 4.4% annual increases and 6.8% employee turnover; and 1% annual increases in ongoing operating expenses. Fiscal 2012 reflects a half year of expenses because the final report is due by December 31, 2011.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: SB 353 (Senator King, *et al.*) - Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs.

Information Source(s): Maryland State Department of Education, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Department of Juvenile Services, American Psychological Association, National Conference of State Legislatures, National Parent Teacher Association, Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - February 13, 2009
mlm/mwc

Analysis by: Caroline L. Boice

Direct Inquiries to:
(410) 946-5510
(301) 970-5510