

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2022 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

House Bill 793
Ways and Means

County Boards of Education - Community Ombudsman - Established

This bill requires, before the 2022-2023 school year begins, each local board of education to designate a community ombudsman. The purpose of the community ombudsman is to provide assistance, as a neutral party, to parents and caregivers of students and other community members who have questions regarding school policies and procedures. The local board may designate the community ombudsman from existing personnel or hire an individual to be the community ombudsman using existing funds. By August 1 each year, the community ombudsman must submit a report to the local board describing the services provided during the prior school year. The report must not disclose the identity of any individuals who receive services. **The bill takes effect July 1, 2022.**

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: None. The bill is directed at local school systems.

Local Effect: Expenditures may increase, to the extent that a local board chooses to hire an ombudsman, pursuant to the authority granted in the bill. It is unclear at this time which local boards will do so and which will designate existing staff. **This bill may impose a mandate on a unit of local government.**

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Bill Summary: The community ombudsman must:

- research applicable school system information, including local board of education policies and procedures;
- refer individuals to the appropriate school system department or personnel or other community resources;
- assist individuals with any established local processes for resolving issues;
- as needed, facilitate communication and discussion between parties; and
- perform any other service that aligns with the purpose of an ombudsman.

Unless disclosure is required in accordance with federal, State, or local law, any communications between a community ombudsman and an individual seeking assistance from the community ombudsman must be confidential.

Current Law: A local board of education is not required to employ a community ombudsman.

Local Expenditures: Local school system expenditures depend on whether they already employ a community ombudsman or similar staff as well as local demand for a community ombudsman. Expenditures increase to the extent that local boards of education choose to hire a community ombudsman rather than designate an existing staff person as the ombudsman. The impact on each local board is currently unknown as some did not respond to requests for information and all local boards were not contacted.

Baltimore City and Frederick County public schools advise that they currently employ an ombudsman; thus, there is no fiscal impact. St. Mary's County Public Schools (SMCPS) advises that it currently uses secretarial staff to provide the required assistance. SMCPS advises that if it is required to employ a single person to fulfill the role, its expenditures would increase. Baltimore County Public Schools advises that it has existing staff who provide the services described in the bill. Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS) advises that it does not employ a community ombudsman and does not have the funds to hire an ombudsman; thus, it anticipates using existing staff to meet the requirement. However, PGCPS advises that given the requirements for the ombudsman, assigning the tasks to existing staff will be challenging.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Designated Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Maryland State Department of Education; Baltimore City Public Schools; Baltimore County Public Schools; Prince George's County Public Schools; Frederick County Public Schools; St. Mary's County Public Schools; Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - March 1, 2022
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