

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2022 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

House Bill 986
Ways and Means

(Delegate Walker)

Public Schools and Youth Sports Programs – Tackle Football Season –
Limitations

This bill limits the annual tackle football season for participants of specified ages and school grade levels to the months of August through December for youth sports programs and public schools. A local board of education may not offer, approve, or sponsor tackle football for students at or below grade 7 during January through July each year. This prohibition applies to (1) a coach-supervised, school-approved, sports- or conditioning-related activity; (2) an intramural athletic activity; (3) an interscholastic athletic activity; or (4) a physical education program. A youth sports program, as defined by the bill, may not provide tackle football or any related physical activity for youth athletes under the age of 14 during January through July. For purposes of the bill, the annual season includes pre-season and regular season practice, regular season games, tournaments, and playoff games. **The bill takes effect July 1, 2022.**

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) can develop guidelines and regulations to implement the bill using existing resources. The bill has no impact on State parks. No effect on revenues.

Local Effect: The bill is not expected to have a significant impact on local government finances or operations.

Small Business Effect: Small businesses that run youth football programs or provide goods and services related to spring season football may be adversely affected.

Analysis

Current Law:

Public School Physical Education

Every public school must have a program of physical education that is given in a planned and sequential manner to all students in order to develop their good health and physical fitness and improve their motor coordination and physical skills. The specific curriculum and course of study is set by each local board of education. Maryland regulations require a physical education comprehensive program to provide a developmentally appropriate instructional program that advances student knowledge, confidence, skills, and motivation to enjoy a lifetime of healthful physical activity.

Interscholastic Athletics

The Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) governs the athletic programs for all high school students in Maryland public secondary schools, which are members of the Maryland Public Secondary Schools Athletic Association (MPSSAA). Local school systems may adopt rules governing their athletic programs that are more restrictive than those of MPSSAA.

Students who are 19 years old or older as of August 31 are ineligible to participate in interscholastic athletics. Football is a fall MPSSAA sport. MPSSAA schools must annually conduct all fall season interscholastic athletic contests and practice sessions between the sixth Wednesday following the first Sunday of July, until the final date of the local, conference, district, regional, or State tournament. Aside from golf, a member MPSSAA school may not participate in a regularly scheduled game until at least 20 calendar days have elapsed after and including the first day of practice. Football is limited to 10 regular season games and not more than one game per week.

School athletic teams may not participate in any contests representing their school before or after the defined sports season. Students may attend a summer sports camp of their choice. Member MPSSAA schools, member school coaches, school-related organizations, or individuals may not sponsor or conduct a camp in which students who are returning players are involved or participate. A camp composed of several coaches with their respective teams is a violation of this regulation. Coaches of member MPSSAA schools, while affiliated with a camp, may not conduct any form of team or group practice involving their school.

Corollary Athletic Program

COMAR authorizes a Corollary Athletic Program in the local school systems to provide athletic opportunities so that every student in public schools may have an equal opportunity to access the benefits of education-based athletic programs. A Corollary Athletic Program is not governed by the requirements related to MPSSAA and public school physical education programs and is specifically designed to combine groups of students with and without disabilities together in physical activity.

Youth Sports Programs

Youth sports programs are programs organized for recreational athletic competition or instruction for participants who are under the age of 19. A “youth athlete” is an individual who participates in an athletic activity in association with a youth sports program conducted at a public school facility or by a recreational athletic organization.

Small Business Effect: According to MSDE and MPSSAA, coaching staff often work with players in the off-season to provide skill and sport education remediation. Also, Maryland-based universities and organizations run spring and summer camps, clinics, and collegiate recruiting combines that feature physical activities related to football. Youth sport programs organize and oversee 7-on-7 leagues and flag football leagues. To the extent that such leagues engage in tackle football during January through July, these activities are prohibited under the bill. Some students and youth sport participants may elect to travel to neighboring states to participate in these type of events. To the extent that this amounts to decreased participation in football programs operated by small businesses, they are adversely affected. Further, small businesses that provide goods and services related to spring football may be adversely affected.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: HB 453 of 2020 passed the House and was referred to the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee. No further action was taken. HB 1308 of 2019 was referred to the House Rules and Executive Nominations Committee, but no further action was taken.

Designated Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Baltimore City Public Schools; St. Mary’s County Public Schools; Maryland State Department of Education; Maryland Department of Health; Department of Natural Resources; Department of Legislative Services

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