

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2026 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

House Bill 355
Ways and Means

**Education - Sexual Abuse and Assault Awareness and Prevention Program -
Human and Sex Trafficking**

This bill requires that the age-appropriate education program on the awareness and prevention of sexual abuse and assault developed and implemented by the State Board of Education (SBE) and each nonpublic school include, for students in grades 6 through 8, material promoting the awareness and prevention of human and sex trafficking. **The bill takes effect July 1, 2026.**

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: None. The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) can develop the required program using existing resources.

Local Effect: Local school systems can provide instruction on the awareness and prevention of human and sex trafficking grades 6 through 8 using existing resources; however, resources may be diverted from existing health curriculum requirements.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law:

Maryland Health Education Standards

With the assistance of the local health department (LHD), each local board of education must provide adequate school health services, instruction in health education, and a

healthful school environment. MSDE and the Maryland Department of Health must jointly develop public standards and guidelines for school health programs and offer assistance to the local boards of education and LHDs in their implementation. Each local school system must designate a school health services program coordinator, but it may authorize the LHD to designate a coordinator.

Each local school system must (1) provide in public schools a comprehensive health education program with sufficient frequency and duration to meet the requirements of the State curriculum for all students in prekindergarten through grade 8 and (2) offer in public schools a comprehensive health education program in grades 9 through 12 that enables students to meet graduation requirements and to select health education electives. Access to the curriculum must be provided for nondiploma-bound students.

In order to graduate from public high school in Maryland, students must complete a credit of health.

State law requires local school systems to teach a number of specified health topics including drug addiction and prevention education; awareness and prevention of sexual abuse and assault; and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) that includes hands-only CPR and the use of an automated external defibrillator.

State regulations require health instruction in the following topics: mental and emotional health; substance abuse prevention; family life and human sexuality; safety and violence prevention; healthy eating; and disease prevention and control.

Awareness and Prevention of Sexual Abuse

SBE and each nonpublic school must develop and implement a program of age-appropriate education on the awareness and prevention of sexual abuse and assault. The program must be taught by a teacher who is trained to provide the instruction on the awareness and prevention of sexual assault and incorporated into the health curriculum of each local board of education and each nonpublic school.

“Nonpublic school” is specified to mean a noncollegiate educational institution that holds a certificate of approval from SBE and participates in the State’s Nonpublic Schools Textbook and Technology Grants program.

New Health Education Standards

New health education standards were adopted by SBE in December 2019; the [Maryland State Framework for Comprehensive Health Education](#) was revised based on those standards. The grade 7 standards require students to analyze laws, policies, and

consequences related to sexual mistreatment, grooming, harassment, abuse, assault, exploitation, and *human trafficking* that are designed to protect young people. The indicators for grades 6 and 8 do not explicitly include the words “human and sex trafficking”; however, the words sexual mistreatment, grooming, harassment, abuse, assault, exploitation, and boundary violations were selected by the committee to represent age-appropriate instruction on abuse, assault, and exploitation for those grades.

Additional Comments: Specified nonpublic school expenditures increase minimally to develop and implement a program of age-appropriate education that includes for students in grades 6 through 8 materials promoting the awareness and prevention of human sex trafficking and to train teachers to deliver the program. A cost estimate cannot be reliably determined; however, it is assumed that the costs to develop and implement a program that meets the requirements of the bill are minimal.

Additional Information

Recent Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has been introduced within the last three years. See HB 763 of 2025 and HB 620 of 2024.

Designated Cross File: SB 254 (Senator Gallion) - Education, Energy, and the Environment.

Information Source(s): Maryland State Department of Education; Baltimore City Public Schools; Montgomery County Public Schools; Prince George’s County Public Schools; Department of Legislative Services

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sj/mcr

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