

BILL: Senate Bill 258
TITLE: Public Schools - Electric Retractable Room Partitions -
Operation Requirements
POSITION: SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS
DATE: February 4, 2020
COMMITTEE: Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs
CONTACT: John R. Woolums, Esq.

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE), representing all of the State's local boards of education, supports Senate Bill 258, with the request for one amendment.

This bill would prohibit a school employee from operating an electric retractable room partition without satisfying specified safety precautions. MABE supports this approach, and respectfully requests the addition of one other permissible way for staff to meet a high safety standard whenever operating electric retractable partitions in our schools.

MABE agrees with the bill provisions to prohibit a school employee from operating an electric retractable room partition unless:

1. the partition includes a safety sensor that automatically stops the movement of the partition when a body passes through the sensor;
2. no students are present in the school building; or
3. the room or area where the partition is located is locked or otherwise free of or inaccessible to students.

MABE requests that a fourth option be made clearly available to school staff, which would read as follows:

4. at least two staff persons are present with one being responsible for prohibiting entry into the room during the operation of the partition.

This option would provide a practical way for staff to satisfy the standard that a room which may not be lockable remains inaccessible to students during the partition's operation.

All local boards believe that providing a quality system of education must include providing safe, high quality school facilities in which all students can learn. However, our school facility needs, including ongoing maintenance and repairs and the type of upgrade intended by this legislation, exceed the amount of funding currently provided. Therefore, we appreciate the flexibility provided by this legislation to allow current staff to ensure a high degree of student safety in the use of electric partitions.

For these reasons, MABE requests a favorable report on Senate Bill 258, with the amendment described above.