



Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director
P.O. Box 12040
Baltimore, Md 21281
410-935-7281
marypat.fannon@pssam.org

Bill: SB 941 – Primary and Secondary Education – Virtual Schools – Alterations
Date: February 12, 2021
Position: Oppose
Committee: Senate Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee
Contact: Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director

This bill authorizes the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), a local board of education, or a public institution of higher education to establish a statewide virtual public school without approval from the State Superintendent of Schools. A statewide virtual public school is exempt from specified State policies and regulations. A statewide virtual public school may not (1) enroll more than 1% of school-aged children in each county and (2) charge any fees or tuition to enroll in or attend the virtual school. The bill establishes a funding formula to distribute federal and State funds to a statewide virtual public school. An institution of higher education may contract with other entities to perform the duties of the virtual school and retain up to 2% of distributed funds to administer the program.

The Public Schools Superintendents’ Association of Maryland (PSSAM), **opposes SB 941.**

PSSAM continues to support local and state efforts to implement virtual learning initiatives, but we oppose any legislative mandates in the creation of these programs. While current regulations may be need to be adjusted as we reflect on our year-long distance learning, these changes should be contemplated by education experts including MSDE, superintendents, and teachers. We need to retain the ability to create these programs to meet and respond to our local priorities, which also includes working with students and communities.

In order to preserve the highest quality public education in Maryland, we need to enter the world of virtual learning with a deliberate, methodical, and research-based approach. We need to create virtual school programs that ensure academic success for our students and instills confidence for families knowing that their children will continue to receive the highest quality instruction. As already mentioned, we need to work collaboratively with the Department and teachers, giving them a meaningful role in the development of virtual schools. A more formally developed virtual learning model is imminent, but it now is not the time to rush into its implementation.

For these reasons, PSSAM requests an **unfavorable** report on Senate Bill 941.