



Board of Education of Howard County
Testimony Submitted to the Maryland House of Delegates,
Health and Government Operations Committee
March 14, 2022

Board of Education
of Howard County

HB0799: UNFAVORABLE
State and Local Government - COVID-19 - Vaccination by Choice Act

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The Board of Education of Howard County (the Board) opposes **HB0799 State and Local Government - COVID-19 - Vaccination by Choice Act** as a restriction on local authority and an overstep into matters that should receive health expert guidance on a case-by-case basis. HB0799, and other bills with similar mandates before this Committee, would take away the ability of the Board and Superintendent to determine whether proof of vaccination should be a requirement for the safety of staff, and ultimately students, in Howard County.

In a continuing effort to maintain safe, healthy learning environments that fully provide instruction and supports for all students, while balancing multiple layers of staffing challenges and workloads, the Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) has implemented vaccine and weekly testing requirements for staff during the 2021-2022 school year. These requirements and protocols are continually reevaluated in conjunction with local health department leaders as we progress through the school year, allowing for ongoing consideration of changes such as the availability for younger students, changing health agencies' guidance, and/or declining COVID infection rates may reduce the threat to the safety of students and staff.

Legislation which limits local board decision-making authority may weaken the Board's bond with the local community and adversely impact the community's participation in the governance and operation of HCPSS. Additionally, local boards are intimately familiar with their own school system's operations and have expertise in how to best implement safety measures for their community. Health measures as called for under HB0799 should also take into consideration up-to-date direction and guidance of health experts.

For these reasons, we urge a UNFAVORABLE report of HB0799 from this Committee.