

**Testimony in Opposition to House Bill 618  
Maryland Parental Rights Act**

**Ways and Means  
Thursday, February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022  
1:00 p.m.**

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Government Relations**

The Maryland State Education Association strongly opposes House Bill 618, which would require that the State Board of Education and county boards of education allow a certain amount of time for certain testimony at public board meetings, prohibit an employee of a school district from withholding information relating to a child's health or well-being from the child's parent or guardian, and require each county board to establish and adopt a certain policy regarding the promotion of parent involvement in the public school system.

MSEA represents 76,000 educators and school employees who work in Maryland's public schools, teaching and preparing our almost 900,000 students for the careers and jobs of the future. MSEA also represents 39 local affiliates in every county across the state of Maryland, and our parent affiliate is the 3-million-member National Education Association (NEA).

The goal of a high-quality public education is to bring together students of all races, classes, identities, and experiences to grow their understanding of the world and prepare for their futures. Yet some politicians seek to divide parents and educators, key players in children's education, and pit them against each other to advance self-serving narratives. Though the bill purports to simply promote parental involvement, the measures it outlines would undermine educators' professional judgement and impede students' privacy.

Educators are trained professionals specialized in their content area and in child development. This legislation would undermine their role by requiring that parental

involvement policies permit parents to “object to instructional materials and other materials, including workbooks and worksheets, handouts, software, applications, and any digital media made available to students...based on beliefs regarding morality, religion, philosophy, any fundamental value system deemed important by a parent, or the belief that the materials are harmful.”<sup>1</sup> This framing pits parents and educators against one another. By placing educational materials up for public debate, it risks children’s right to a complete and honest education that allows them to learn from the mistakes of the past and prepare for a better future.

The bill goes on to mandate that “No information relating to a minor child should be withheld, either inadvertently or purposefully, from the child’s parent, including information relating to the child’s health, well-being, and education,”<sup>2</sup> and that “No information relating to the health and well-being of a minor child documented by any employee of the school district, including diagnoses or observations given by employees trained in medicine or mental health, shall be withheld from a child’s parent or guardian.”<sup>3</sup> Engaging families in relevant information about their child’s progress is an essential piece of an educator’s role. This framing wrongly implies a lack of transparency and again frames parents and educators in conflict, despite their shared interest. The sweeping notification requirements outlined in this bill lack nuance and consideration for students’ privacy, and in some cases may violate conduct standards for counselors and mental health professionals handling sensitive information.<sup>4</sup>

Educators want all children to receive an accurate, honest education that allows them to pursue their dreams. When families and educators work together, we can equip our students and schools with the resources to deliver quality education that prepares every child for the future. This legislation would undermine that

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<sup>1</sup> Maryland General Assembly (2022). *Bill Text HB 618*. Retrieved on February 22, 2022, from <https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2022RS/bills/hb/hb0618F.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Carlson, N. *Counseling Today: A Publication of the American Counseling Association (2017). To tell or not to tell: The fine line between minors’ privacy and others’ right to know*. Retrieved on February 22, 2022, from [https://www.counseling.org/docs/default-source/ethics/ethics-columns/ethics\\_october-2017\\_minor-privacy.pdf?sfvrsn=a25522c\\_6](https://www.counseling.org/docs/default-source/ethics/ethics-columns/ethics_october-2017_minor-privacy.pdf?sfvrsn=a25522c_6)



partnership and sow division between the parties most invested in students' success. **We urge the committee to issue an unfavorable report on House Bill 618.**