



## House Bill 547

*Local School Systems - Equivalent Access Standards - Digital Tools  
(Nonvisual Access Accountability Act for K-12 Education)*

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Ways and Means Committee

**WITH AMENDMENTS**

Date: February 24, 2022

From: Brianna January

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS HB 547 WITH AMENDMENTS**. While well-intentioned, this bill as drafted, would place a costly mandate on school systems and county governments to carry out new state policy and provide all students with digital tools accessible by students with disabilities.

MACo supports the merits of creating accommodations for all students—each county school board and leadership approach these access issues with the proper gravity. However, HB 547 would substitute a one-size-fits-all state policy for that local judgment.

The state funding for public schools is set via formula. Adding new cost components to the required school program belies the lengthy debates regarding these adequacy figures. Counties have no choice but to support these new costs, competing for limited local funds against school facilities, public safety, roadway maintenance, and the full range of other essential public services. An amendment to HB 547 to provide state funding to support local jurisdictions as they procure the accessibility tools up to the standards outlined by the bill would allow counties the ability to purchase more accessible tools in greater quantity and of superior quality.

Currently, local school jurisdictions provide reasonable accommodations, including accessible tools and resources in-line with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which sets nationwide standards. The reality is that some jurisdictions serve larger populations of students with vision accessibility needs than others, and HB 547's rigid language would not allow an individual local government to make the decisions that best suit the needs of its unique student population. An amendment to HB 547 to soften some of the rigid, inflexible language around equivalent access standards would allow counties to continue serving students with disabilities in the most practicable manner best suited for the unique needs and abilities of each jurisdiction.

Local school systems work to meet the unique needs of each student through individualized services and develop responses to changing technology and learning factors accordingly. HB 547, as drafted, would upend this sensible policy. Accordingly, MACo urges a report of **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENT** for HB 547.