

BILL: House Bill 938
TITLE: Education - School Accountability - Parent Empowerment and Choice
POSITION: OPPOSE
DATE: March 9, 2022
COMMITTEE: Ways and Means Committee
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The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) opposes House Bill 938, which would create a petition-drive process for mandating school reform measures, including school closure and reopening as a public charter school or school closure and reassignment of all students to public charter schools.

MABE supports the establishment of high performing public charter schools to accomplish the original intent of the 2003 Public Charter School Act. MABE supported the balanced approach of this landmark legislation to “to establish an alternative means within the existing public school system in order to provide innovative learning opportunities and creative educational approaches to improve the education of students.” In 2015, MABE supported major revisions to the Charter School Act which were enacted to further enhance the ability of high performing charter schools to operate with greater autonomy, while preserving strong accountability measures.

Local boards of education certainly agree that local boards of education should work closely and collaborative with parents and guardians regarding school performance and improvement. However, MABE opposes this bill because we believe that educationally appropriate responses to improving teaching and learning conditions and outcomes in high-needs school must continue to be in the purview of each local board of education. MABE opposes this bill’s proposal to create mandated school reform process focused on the establishment of, or transfer of students to, public charter schools. MABE does not believe that local school systems should be limited to the school restructuring options provided under this bill. However, it must be noted that the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future calls for much greater accountability for school-based budgeting and student performance, and scrutiny by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) and Accountability and Implementation Board (AIB).

As this Committee knows. MABE consistently advocates that federal and state laws and regulations preserve the governance role of local boards of education. MABE’s support of local board governance authority and autonomy extends to all public schools, including public charter schools. Local boards attribute the longstanding, successful track record of Maryland’s high performing public charter schools to the balance of autonomy and flexibility for charter school operators and a strong accountability role for local boards.

Again, MABE opposes this bill because it would unnecessarily and unwisely establish the unprecedented right of a simple majority of parents and guardians to trigger complete restructuring of a public school and public charter school.

For these reasons, MABE urges this Committee to issue an unfavorable report on House Bill 938.