

BILL: House Bill 793
TITLE: County Boards of Education - Community Ombudsman - Established
DATE: March 3, 2022
POSITION: OPPOSE
COMMITTEE: Ways and Means
CONTACT: John R. Woolums, Esq.

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) opposes House Bill 793, which would mandate that each county board of education create and fund a community ombudsman position to assist with disputes regarding school policies and procedures.

MABE generally opposes efforts by the General Assembly to legislate the state-wide creation of positions in local school systems, especially without additional adequate funding to secure those positions. MABE's opposition to this bill does not rest on an evaluation of the merits of creating any specified position within a local school system, certainly not that of community ombudsman, but rather opposition to statutorily mandating the universal creation of positions across all local jurisdictions.

More specifically, this bill would create a strain on already limited personnel within school systems. The language of this bill requires each school system to either designate an ombudsman from existing personnel within the school system or hire additional personnel using existing funds. School systems around the state are still experiencing record low hiring and retention rates among staff caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. MABE is concerned that placing a universal mandate on systems to reallocate funding to create new positions would create undue hardship on local school system budgets. Each of Maryland's local boards and school systems have the governance authority to hire and designate personnel, and MABE strongly supports their authority to create and fund community ombudsman positions based on local prerogative.

For these reasons, MABE requests an unfavorable report on House Bill 793.