

**BILL:** House Bill 375  
**TITLE:** Education - Coaches - Mental Health First Aid Training  
**DATE:** March 9, 2023  
**POSITION:** SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS  
**COMMITTEE:** Appropriations  
Ways and Means  
**CONTACT:** John R. Woolums, Esq.

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) supports House Bill 375 with amendments to remove the mandate to provide the “mental health first aid” training specified in the bill. MABE supports only the bill’s proposal that the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), in collaboration with the Maryland Department of Health (MDH), each local board of education, and the Maryland Public Secondary Schools Athletic Association (MPSSAA) to develop guidelines for public schools to train coaches to heighten awareness regarding student mental health issues, including but not exclusively via the mental health first aid program.

MABE supports House Bill 375 with amendments to clarify and correct the definitions so that the bill applies specifically to coaches of public school system intramural and interscholastic athletic activities; and does not mandate, but leaves to local board policy and administrative and budgeting discretion, how extensively to deliver mental health training to coaches, including the day-long mental health first aid training program. “Mental Health First Aid” is a national program with parameters for in-person training that MABE believes are not appropriate to adopt as a one-size-fits-all mandate for all school systems and all coaches in the state.

MABE’s support for this bill is grounded in the association’s advocacy for the essential staffing and resources necessary to meet the mental and behavioral health needs of our nearly 900,000 public school students. The benefits and value of access to high quality school-based mental and behavioral health services for students and families, teachers and staff, and communities at large can hardly be overstated. Prior to the pandemic, evidence was mounting that additional resources were needed to provide the holistic array of social, emotional, behavioral and academic supports for all students. Then the pandemic saw a dramatic rise in students reporting experiencing anxiety and depression and other symptoms. Today, students and staff are coping with these accumulated challenges in an environment of educator and other professional staffing shortages.

In this context, broadening the scope of statewide school health guidance to include the types of appropriate mental health training available to coaches engaged with students makes sense. MABE and all local boards place the highest priority on protecting our students’ physical and mental health and welfare while under our care and supervision, and therefore appreciate this bill’s intent to enhance the level of mental health training for coaches. However, the bill includes terminology, such as “mainstream athletics” that MABE believes should be conformed to references to interscholastic athletics, intramurals, and other school sponsored athletic programs. In addition, MABE reiterates the request to remove the mandate to provide “mental health first aid training” to all coaches. (Requested amendment to strike lines 15-17 on page 2 of the bill.)

For these reasons, MABE requests a favorable report on House Bill 375 with the amendments described above.