

BILL: House Bill 375
TITLE: Education - Coaches - Mental Health Training
DATE: March 29, 2023
POSITION: OPPOSE
COMMITTEE: Education, Energy, and the Environment
CONTACT: John R. Woolums, Esq.

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) opposes House Bill 375 based on serious concerns with a bill that, as amended, would continue to mandate that school systems provide training to all coaches to recognize indicators of mental illness in students.

MABE initially supported House Bill 375 with amendments to remove the mandate to provide the “mental health first aid” training specified in the bill, and appreciates that this amendment was adopted before the bill passed in the House. MABE also supports 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) 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.

However, MABE opposes House Bill 375 in its current form based on remaining objections to bill provisions mandating universal training of coaches. In addition, the bill continues to include terminology, such as “mainstream athletics” that MABE believes should be conformed to references to interscholastic athletics, intramurals, and other school sponsored athletic programs. Lastly, MABE opposes the stand-alone nature of the mandate to train coaches, relative the provision of professional development for other school personnel. Professional development is essential, worthwhile, and extremely staff time, and therefore budget, intensive. In this context, House Bill 375 also presents an unfunded mandate.

Again, MABE supports and advocates 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.

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, for the reasons outlined above, MABE requests an unfavorable report on House Bill 375.