

BILL: House Bill 515
TITLE: Public Schools – Active Shooter Safety Drills – Requirements
DATE: February 15, 2023
POSITION: OPPOSE
COMMITTEE: Ways and Means
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The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) opposes House Bill 515 because it would impose unnecessarily strict limitations on the administration of school emergency drills, including active shooter drills, and impose significant new costs and staffing requirements relating to these drills. Specifically, the bill would limit active shooter drills using persons portraying an active shooter, and using loud sounds, to exercises after school hours and made voluntary to any students or staff. MABE is especially concerned that such limitations could unduly limit the ability of school systems to train staff in their roles and responsibilities in an active shooter incident.

MABE supports maintaining the law and regulations governing school system emergency preparedness, including the requirements to develop emergency plans and conduct emergency drills, including active shooter drills. Local boards are concerned that the limitations imposed by House Bill 515 would unduly limit local discretion to provide the array of necessary emergency preparedness drills in conjunction with local law enforcement agencies, fire officials, and others.

The State Fire Prevention Code requires school facilities with automatic sprinkler systems to hold five fire drills per year, with at least two occurring in the first four months of the school year. Schools that are not fully protected by automatic sprinkler systems must hold eight fire drills annually, with at least three scheduled in the first four months of the school year. In addition to these fire drills, regulations adopted in 2013 mandated that school systems annually conduct six emergency drills, including: evacuation; shelter in place; reverse evacuation; lock down; drop, cover and hold; and severe weather (COMAR 13A.02.02.01-.04). The Safe to Learn Act of 2018 further defined “drill” to mean “a formalized exercise by which school system personnel, staff, or students rehearse a school emergency plan” (Ed. Art. § 7-1501).

The Safe to Learn Act, bipartisan legislation passed in 2018 in response to national and Maryland experiences with school shootings, called on the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), in consultation with the School Safety Subcabinet, to adopt regulations to incorporate in the annual schedule of the drills described above, developmentally and age-appropriate components of: (1) the active shooter preparedness program developed by the department of homeland security or guidelines; or (2) the active shooter guidelines adopted by the Maryland Active Assailant Work Group (Ed. Art. § 7-1509). The law also provides that active shooter drills “may include developmentally and age-appropriate procedures for students or school personnel in: (1) securing classrooms; (2) barricading classrooms and school entries; (3) taking refuge in the classroom; and (4) when appropriate, escape from the classroom or school.” MABE believes these components, and the local discretion to craft exercises that cover them, strikes the appropriate balance of state guidance and local flexibility.

For these reasons, MABE requires an unfavorable report on House Bill 515.