

UNFAVORABLE
Senate Bill 552
Operating Budget – Funding – Scholarships for Nonpublic School Students

Senate Budget & Taxation Committee
February 7, 2024

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The Maryland State Education Association stands in strong opposition to Senate Bill 552, which codifies Maryland's school voucher program, Broadening Options and Opportunities for Students Today (BOOST), into law and mandates an increasing amount of funding between Fiscal Year 2026 and Fiscal Year 2029. Not only does MSEA call for an unfavorable report on this bill, MSEA continues our request for the complete elimination of the program.

MSEA represents 75,000 educators and school employees who work in Maryland's public schools, teaching and preparing our almost 900,000 students so they can pursue their dreams. MSEA also represents 39 local affiliates in every county across the state of Maryland, and our parent affiliate is the 3 million-member National Education Association (NEA).

Public dollars should fund public schools. The BOOST private school voucher program has been highly controversial since its inception and diverts attention and resources from the real needs of our students and public school communities.

This bill, as written, does not lay out the current minimum standards to participate in the program that have existed in budget language. These minimum nondiscrimination standards have already been difficult to enforce. The collective priority, if the vouchers are to continue in any way, should be looking for ways to strengthen those protections rather than looking for ways to increase support for schools without strict nondiscrimination policies. BOOST and other programs which send taxpayer dollars to private institutions have been a target for lawsuits and litigation that cost time and money of the Attorney General and the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE).

The State and education stakeholders (parents, students, educators) spent many years working to determine how we can increase standards for our students and educators through the Blueprint for Maryland's Future. Schools that participate in the BOOST voucher program do not have the same rigorous standards or accountability to legislators or taxpayers. They are not required to administer the same standards-based assessments, the certification requirements for their teachers are not comparable, and educators are not evaluated similarly, yet these schools are given public tax dollars. Public funding should go to public schools with high standards to serve ALL Maryland students.

MSEA strongly urges an Unfavorable Report on Senate Bill 552.