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FAVORABLE
House Bill 167
Public Schools - Student Health – Information on Accessible Dental Health

Senate Committee on Education, Energy, and the Environment
April 2, 2024

Lauren Lamb
Government Relations

The Maryland State Education Association supports House Bill 167 as amended, which would require the State Department of Education to support and facilitate each county board of education in publishing information on accessible dental health options.

MSEA represents 75,000 educators and school employees who work in Maryland's public schools, teaching and preparing our almost 900,000 students for the careers and jobs of the future. 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).

MSEA supports policies that provide Maryland students access to the resources they need to achieve their full potential. We understand that our students' health and wellness directly impact their academic and non-academic outcomes. Children who are unwell are more likely to not attend school, and children who are sick or who are in pain due to poor dental health cannot be fully engaged in their learning. We have also seen the horrific consequences of inequitable health care access, exemplified by the tragic loss of 12-year-old Deamonte Driver, who died in 2007 of a brain infection caused by an abscessed tooth.

Ensuring that all of Maryland's children are healthy and ready to learn includes increasing access to affordable dental health care. We applaud that this bill would make information about such care more readily available to the families of children in public schools. By sharing resources on free and low-cost dental clinics or state programs that cover dental care, school systems can promote the dental health and overall well-being of children and their families.

We urge the committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 167.

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**2024 SESSION
POSITION PAPER**

BILL: **HB 167 – Public Schools – Student Health – Information on Accessible Dental Health**

COMMITTEE: **Senate – Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee**

POSITION: **Letter of Support As Amended**

BILL ANALYSIS: **HB 167 would require the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to support and facilitate each county Board of Education in publishing information on financially accessible dental health available in the county in student handbooks and on local school system websites.**

POSITION RATIONALE:

The Maryland Association of County Health Officers (MACHO) supports HB 167 as amended. MACHO recognizes the intent of HB 167 as an effort to improve dental health among Maryland’s school children. Prior to the amendments, MACHO expressed concern that the bill provisions would constitute an unfunded mandate with significant administrative and likely programmatic burden on already stretched resources of the school health nurses in the public schools across the State. The amendments made and approved by the House have resolved these concerns.

As currently amended, the bill would require the Maryland State Department of Education to work with county Boards of Education to provide information to students and their families regarding financially accessible dental health available in the county in student handbooks and on local school system websites. This information can serve as a helpful resource to caregivers as they seek dental care for their children.

For these reasons, the Maryland Association of County Health Officers submits this Letter of Support As Amended for HB 167. For more information, please contact Ruth Maiorana, MACHO Executive Director at rmaiora1@jhu.edu or 410-937-1433. *This communication reflects the position of MACHO.*