

Maryland Catholic Conference_FAV_HB620_SenateCross

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Position: FAV



MARYLAND
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE

April 2, 2024

House Bill 620

**Education - Sexual Abuse and Assault Awareness and Prevention Program -
Human and Sex Trafficking
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee**

Position: Favorable

The Maryland Catholic Conference (MCC) is the public policy representative of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, which together encompass over one million Marylanders. Statewide, their parishes, schools, hospitals, and numerous charities combine to form our state's second largest social service provider network, behind only our state government.

House Bill 620 requires age-appropriate educational programming on awareness and prevention of human trafficking to be included in existing sexual abuse and assault prevention curriculum for students in grades six through eight.

Promoting awareness about the realities of human trafficking is essential in the fight to combat it. Horribly, Maryland's central location has facilitated its development as both a pass-through state and a destination for human traffickers. Traffickers utilize many of Maryland's highways, especially Interstate-95, to connect victims to major east coast cities such as New York, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C. The Maryland Human Trafficking Task Force has identified incidents of sex trafficking at Maryland truck stops, and data from the National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC) suggests that approximately 70 percent of human trafficking incidents occur in our nation's truck stops.¹ Unfortunately, few Marylanders are aware of the presence of human trafficking in the state, leaving traffickers hidden and children more vulnerable to exploitation. Education on the awareness and prevention of human trafficking in an age-appropriate way for all students in Maryland is a crucial first step in adding more eyes and ears to anti-trafficking efforts.

At risk youth can better prepare themselves with age-appropriate education regarding human trafficking. Children in sixth through eighth grade have technology at their disposal that lends itself to dangerous situations. The average age of entry into the commercial sex trade ranges

¹ <http://www.mdhumantrafficking.org/maryland>

between the ages of 12-14.² While they are exploring their friendships and using social media to connect, they are a prime target for human trafficking. A 2020 report indicated a 125% increase in Facebook recruitment trafficking and 95% increase of recruitment trafficking on Instagram.³ With the rise of technology exploitation, traffickers can easily connect with victims through fake profiles and establish trust before exploiting their victims in person. Age-appropriate education will allow for students to connect to the material and lead to discussion, problem solving, and meaningful activities that will allow for them to become aware of the risks and armed with tools to combat suspicious activity. The introduction of this age-appropriate education will enable youth to realize they are valued members of society and empower them to be advocates for themselves and others against human trafficking. Pope Francis frequently condemns the horror of trafficking in persons, declaring, “Human trafficking is an open wound on the body of contemporary society, a scourge upon the body of Christ.”⁴

For these reasons, the MCC asks for a favorable report on **HB 620**.

Thank you for your consideration.

² https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/sites/default/files/USDOE_UseCase_HT_2017.pdf

³ <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/blog/2022/07/technologys-complicated-relationship-human-trafficking>

⁴ https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/april/documents/papa-francesco_20140410_tratta-persone-umane.html

HB620 Joint LOO_MSDE_State Board.pdf

Uploaded by: Laurel Cratsley

Position: UNF

TO: Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

BILL: House Bill (HB) 620 - Education - Sexual Abuse and Assault Awareness and Prevention Program - Human and Sex Trafficking

DATE: April 2, 2024

POSITION: Oppose

Chair Feldman and Members of the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee:

The Maryland State Board of Education (State Board) and the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) respectfully oppose **HB 620**, which would require Maryland’s Local Education Agencies (LEAs) and non-public schools that receive textbook and technology grants to incorporate instructional materials for students in grades 6 through 8 that promote the awareness of human and sex trafficking in their health education curriculum.

We do not oppose this legislation based on the merits of the proposed subject matter but on the grounds that the legislative requirement would be duplicative of current regulatory requirements and run counter to the process that is entrusted to the State Board, MSDE, and LEAs.

While the State Board and MSDE are supportive of the fundamental principles outlined in the requirements of the bill, the State Board and MSDE have an established process for reviewing, revising, and adopting standards, frameworks, and curricular resources. Both entities are strident in ensuring that the inclusion of content-specific curricular resources is conducted through this process, which includes collaboration between the State Board, MSDE, the Maryland Department of Health (MDH), LEAs, national subject matter experts, and stakeholders.

To be included in this process is the MSDE proposed “Standards and Frameworks Review Committee” (SFRC), which will enhance the process’s mechanism for responding to emergent standards, framework, and curricular resource needs. The SFRC shall be comprised of no more than ten educators (such as teachers, administrators, and/or content supervisors), two parents of Maryland Public School students, two community members (such as University scholars and/or associated content experts) as well as a chairperson selected by MSDE. All members of the SFRC shall undergo a rigorous application and selection process along with training in MSDE protocol. The objective and scope of the SFRC shall be to improve student outcomes by ensuring the alignment of standards and frameworks to emergent needs as identified by MSDE.

Separate processes and timelines for the review and approval of standards, frameworks, and curricular resources could be counterproductive to both MSDE and LEAs. HB 620 would allow for a short timeline for LEAs to complete the required curricular resource development, training, and procurement of new materials.

Beyond this, the established [Comprehensive Health Education Framework](#), written by a diverse group of content experts and stakeholders, includes research-based, age-appropriate topics and indicators for middle school students to learn about sexual mistreatment, grooming, harassment, abuse, assault, exploitation, and human trafficking, as required in this bill.

Further, COMAR 13A.04.18.02 supports the implementation of this framework as the regulation requires local superintendents to certify to the State Superintendent of Schools that the instructional programming within grades prekindergarten through 12 meets, at a minimum, the requirements of the Comprehensive Health Education Framework.

MSDE, in partnership with the State Board, MDH, teachers, supervisors, parents, institutions of higher education, and other stakeholders, will continue to undertake significant reviews of state standards and frameworks. In this process, MSDE will be certain to include our critical partners in the General Assembly.

The State Board and the Department request that the committee consider this information on **HB 620**. Please contact Dr. Akilah Alleyne, Executive Director of Government Affairs, Education Policy, and Government Relations, at Akilah.alleyne@maryland.gov or at 410-767-0504 or Zach Hands, Executive Director of the State Board, at Zachary.hands1@maryland.gov or at 443-915-6094, if you would like any additional information.

HB 620 - xover - sexual abuse awareness PSSAM oppo

Uploaded by: Mary Pat Fannon

Position: UNF



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TITLE: HB 620 - Education - Sexual Abuse and Assault Awareness and Prevention
Program - Human and Sex Trafficking

DATE: April 2, 2024

POSITION: Unfavorable

COMMITTEE: Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

CONTACT: Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director, PSSAM

This bill requires that age-appropriate education program on the awareness and prevention of sexual abuse and assault be developed and implemented by the State Board of Education and certain nonpublic schools, for students in grades 6 through 8, material promoting the awareness and prevention of human and sex trafficking.

PSSAM is supportive of the intent of this bill, but must **oppose** due to our core philosophy that curriculum decisions are left to superintendents and their local boards of education. However, it is important to note that many local school systems are currently incorporating these important topics in their health curriculum.

Under current law each local school system must provide a comprehensive health education program for all students in prekindergarten through grade 8, and offer an education program in grades 9 through 12 that enables students to meet graduation requirements, and to select health education electives. In order to graduate from a public high school in Maryland, students must complete one credit of health; this was changed from a half credit requirement two years ago. Moving to a full credit will give additional time to address the specific concerns of human and sex trafficking without a mandate from the Legislature.

PSSAM thanks the sponsor for his interest and advocacy but firmly believes decisions regarding curriculum belong to superintendents and local boards of education working together with the State Board of Education.

XHB620_MSEA_Lamb_INFO.pdf

Uploaded by: Lauren Lamb

Position: INFO

INFORMATIONAL
House Bill 620
Education – Sexual Abuse and Assault Awareness and Prevention Program – Human
and Sex Trafficking

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

Lauren Lamb
Government Relations

The Maryland State Education Association offers this informational testimony on House Bill 620, which would require that courses covering information on the awareness and prevention of sexual abuse and assault would also include, for students in grades 6-8, material promoting the awareness and prevention of human and sex trafficking.

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).

MSEA tenaciously advocates for the policies and programs that will give our students access to the resources they need to achieve their full potential. We understand clearly that the health and safety of our students has a direct impact on their academic and nonacademic outcomes. However, MSEA has a longstanding concern about legislatively mandating curriculum. We believe that it is the purview of the MSDE and the State Board of Education to develop and implement curriculum standards to meet the academic needs of the students served in Maryland's public schools. It is then the responsibility of local districts to determine how best to implement a program of study that best serves the needs of their students.

We appreciate the intent of this legislation and the importance of the subject matter proposed. However, adding content to the health curriculum raises concern about the amount of content already required to be covered—particularly given that the course is only a ½ credit course—and how new subjects could best be incorporated. We believe that local boards and educators—particularly those who are health educators, mental and behavioral health educators, and health practitioners embedded within our schools—are best suited to address this issue and to determine how best to include it into currently required content.