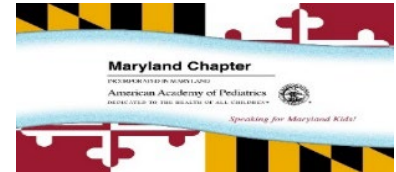




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TO: The Honorable Vanessa E. Atterbeary, Chair
Members, House Ways and Means Committee

FROM: Christine K. Krone
Pamela Metz Kasemeyer
J. Steven Wise
Danna L. Kauffman
Andrew G. Vetter

DATE: February 7, 2024

RE: **SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENT** – House Bill 558 – *Primary and Secondary Education – Comprehensive Health Education Framework – Established*

On behalf of The Maryland State Medical Society (MedChi) and the Maryland Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (MDAAP), we submit this letter of **support with amendment** for House Bill 558.

MedChi and MDAAP are very supportive of the objectives of House Bill 558, which would require the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), in consultation with the Maryland Department of Health, to develop a comprehensive health education framework. The bill specifies that the framework shall, at a minimum, include a number of topics, which are critical to enhancing the awareness and understanding of youth about significant issues that could ultimately impact their health and well-being. These topics include: health promotion, mental and emotional health, substance abuse prevention, family life and human sexuality, gender identity and sexual orientation, safety and violence prevention, healthy eating, and disease prevention and control.

The above-named organizations recognize and support the provision of comprehensive and age-appropriate health education. Many of the subject areas identified in the legislation reflect issues that all youth should be informed about and should have an opportunity to engage in better understanding their implications. Without comprehensive education programs in the schools, many students will not have an avenue to gain the education and insight that would be provided through the required curriculum. However, MedChi and MDAAP do not support the “opt out” option afforded to parents for family life and human sexuality and gender identity and sexual identity subject matters. These issues are some of the most complex and impactful on a child and adolescent’s physical and mental health well-being. Allowing parents to prevent their children from learning about these subject matters almost assures these children will not have access to critical information that may assist them in addressing these issues in their lives, with their peers, and in relationships with their families. **MedChi and MDAAP strongly urge the opt out provisions be deleted from the legislation.**

Based on the comprehensive framework developed by MSDE, House Bill 558 also requires each County Board to create an age-appropriate curriculum that is consistent with that framework. In developing its curriculum, the bill requires each County Board to establish a committee composed of educators, health experts, and members of the local community to review and comment on whether the curriculum materials are consistent with the comprehensive health education framework. To that end, MedChi and MDAAP would request that the bill be amended to specifically specify that the health experts, which will be serving on these committees, specifically include pediatricians with expertise in both child and adolescent medicine.

With its amendments noted, the above-named organizations request a favorable report.

For more information call:

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