



BILL: House Bill 971 / Senate Bill 851
TITLE: Interscholastic Athletics- Student Eligibility Waiver and School Classification
HEARING DATE: February 21, 2024 / March 6, 2024
POSITION: SUPPORT
COMMITTEE: House Ways and Means / Senate Education, Energy and the Environment
CONTACT: Mr. Steve Edwards, Deputy Communications Officer (301-766-8914)

The Washington County Board of Education supports House Bill 971/Senate Bill 851, which authorize a county board of education to waive a certain eligibility requirement for participation in interscholastic athletics at a certain Maryland Public Secondary Schools Athletic Association member school for students who attend certain public high schools; and require a county superintendent of schools to report to the Maryland Public Secondary Schools Athletic Association the school enrollment of member schools in grades 9, 10, and 11 in a certain manner.

Quite simply, this bill is about providing all students with the opportunity to participate in interscholastic athletics while also pursuing special career and/or academic training at a programmatic or virtual school other than their zoned high school. For many students, having the opportunity to compete in interscholastic athletics provides them with an additional incentive to regularly attend school and achieve academically. Being part of a team and competing in interscholastic athletics also enables students to learn important soft skills and life lessons in a way that is meaningful to them.

In Washington County, the Barbara Ingram School for the Arts, or BISFA, is open to all high school students interested in arts programming. Since opening in 2009, BISFA has never had an enrollment greater than 400 students in an academic year. While this unique comprehensive high school provides students with excellent opportunities in the arts, it does not offer athletic programs. As an alternative, students enrolled at BISFA may participate in interscholastic athletics at South Hagerstown High School which is the high school located in the BISFA attendance zone that offers such programs. While some students take advantage of this opportunity, most do not have any association to South High as it is not their home high school and not the school they attend each day.

BISFA exemplifies the issue this bill will help to resolve. Although there are students at small programmatic and virtual schools, like BISFA, who want to engage in interscholastic athletics, these schools typically do not have their own athletic programs, the necessary facilities and fields, or enough interest among their small student populations to field teams and remain eligible. Allowing students to request a waiver that will enable them to participate in athletic programs at their home school will address this issue and give students another opportunity to engage with their respective schools and school communities.

We support House Bill 971 as it would allow students athletic opportunities at their home school by providing those who participate in small, programmatic and virtual schools with the same opportunity to participate in athletics as their peers enjoy at their home high school. If we are seeking to do what is in the best interest of students, allowing local Boards of Education to consider eligibility waivers as outlined in the bill is the right thing to do.

Washington County Board of Education respectfully request a favorable report on House Bill 971.

Thank you.

Cc: Washington County Board of Education Members
Washington County Delegation to the Maryland General Assembly
Dr. David T. Sovine, Superintendent
Dr. Jennifer Webster, Associate Superintendent for Administration and Leadership
Dr. Garry Willow, Associate Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction
Mr. Jeffrey Proulx, Chief Operating Officer
Ms. Ilissa Ramm, Chief Legal Counsel
Mr. John Woolums, Director of Governmental Relations, Maryland Association of Boards of Education
Ms. Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director, Public School Superintendents' Association of Maryland