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**BILL:** HB 1403

**TITLE:** Primary and Secondary Education - Full-Time Equivalent Enrollment Count - Alterations (Truancy Reduction Act of 2025)

**DATE:** March 5, 2025

**POSITION:** Unfavorable

**COMMITTEE:** House Appropriations Committee

**CONTACT:** Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director, PSSAM

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The Public School Superintendents' Association of Maryland (PSSAM), on behalf of all twenty-four local school superintendents, **opposes** House Bill 1403.

This bill alters the definition of full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollment that is used to calculate State education aid and local government education funding requirements to include the average number of students enrolled on September 30, December 31, March 31, and the last day of the prior school year instead of only the September 30 count from the prior year used under current law. The bill takes effect July 1, 2025, and is applicable to the calculation of education funding for fiscal 2027 and subsequent fiscal years.

PSSAM opposes House Bill 1403 and advocates for maintaining the current methodology for counting students enrolled in public schools on September 30th to determine state and local aid amounts for the following fiscal year.

PSSAM cautions that this calculation change would present a number of challenges for local school systems. Most alarmingly, it would delay the final State and county funding appropriations until after the prior school year is over, complicating the implementation of the next school year's budget. Additionally, this methodology would create an unstable and unpredictable amount of funding in the middle of a fiscal year if a school system were to lose student enrollment during the school year. Lastly, it would create a new, administrative burden to add three more formal attendance exercises to an already exhaustive list of daily requirements on school-based staff.

While the title of this legislation talks indicates “truancy reduction,” in practice, it is a shift to use average daily attendance, and hurts the very students it purports to help. This legislation provides no meaningful, or positive mechanism to promote attendance and deter truancy. This legislation only uses the threat of losing funding as a means to incentive change - a dubious public policy when it comes to ensuring a free and appropriate public education to Maryland’s school children.

Based on the analysis of similar past proposals, this bill would ultimately reduce the state’s overall obligation to fund public education, disproportionately impacting jurisdictions with higher student absenteeism rates. Local school systems prioritize regular student attendance and invest heavily in programs aimed at preventing, reducing, and addressing chronic absenteeism. However, House Bill 1403 ties state funding reductions to absenteeism rates—the very challenge that school systems are mandated to combat with additional resources. As a result, districts with higher absenteeism throughout the school year would face the greatest funding losses due to lower enrollment counts recorded later in the year.

Once again, local superintendents take the issue of student attendance very seriously and work diligently to ensure that every student attends school regularly. However, PSSAM believes that this bill’s approach does not effectively promote student attendance and is not the appropriate way to address the issue.

For these reasons, PSSAM **opposes** House Bill 1403 and kindly requests an **unfavorable** report.