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of Howard County**

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**Board of Education of Howard County  
Testimony Submitted to the Maryland Senate,  
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee  
March 5, 2025**

**SB0916: UNFAVORABLE**

**Education - Curriculum Standards - Requirements (Educate to Stop the Hate Act)**

The Board of Education of Howard County (the Board) oppose **Education - Curriculum Standards - Requirements (Educate to Stop the Hate Act)** as a curriculum mandate.

SB916 broadly encompasses curriculum development and school system requirements around the use of updated standards developed by the State for all subject levels. Initially, the bill defines “content standards” as the statements for the program of instruction that describe the knowledge and skills students are expected to attain for each content area and grade level, “curriculum resources” as guidance documents and frameworks used by a county board to develop curricula to implement content standards, and “curriculum standards” as the statements that outline approaches to learning for each content area across grade levels. Based on these definitions, the bill requires content standards and curriculum standards developed by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to: include evidence-based practices and the science of instruction to ensure that all students meet their full potential; consider the impact on all students with a strategic focus on marginalized student groups; and reflect the history of marginalized groups with particular consideration of the associated historical context and root causes. Content standards and curriculum standards must be reviewed and updated by MSDE at least every eight years. Lastly, if a county board fails to establish curriculum resources and courses of study aligned with the content standards and curriculum standards developed by MSDE, the State Superintendent may withhold funds.

These amendments have the effect of tipping the traditional balance between State oversight and local control over the delivery of education in Maryland to a one-sided authority. Staff reads the definition of “curriculum standards” as the indicators and objectives found in the current [MSDE Social Studies Framework](#). While these are used as guidance at the local level, professional curriculum staff employed by the Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) use their expertise to determine the best approach to teaching the broader subject requirements in a way that fits local needs. As a legislative platform the Board supports local decision making in the development of curriculum that accounts for a balance of educational practices, available resources, public input, and accountability that is informed and guided by State Board established standards and models, rather than legislative mandates to strictly follow every element of the guidelines established by the MSDE. Legislation which limits local board decision-making authority may weaken the Board’s bond with the local community and adversely impact the community’s participation in the governance and operation of the school system.

In the preamble to the bill, the sponsors address the fact that overreach into school system operations through legislation is not the norm, stating “WHEREAS, It is a policy of the General Assembly to avoid legislating the instruction of the public school system, but the unprecedented expressions of hate, bigotry, and prejudice have reached a critical and alarming mass requiring that the General Assembly take unprecedented policy action to best achieve outcomes for the people of the State.” While staff agrees with the intent of SB0916, the bill reflects a fundamental flaw in root

cause analysis. Data around the rise of hate crimes can and should be tied to causes outside the control of schools.

Within the uncodified language of the bill, SB0916 includes curriculum mandates for social studies at all grade levels to include specific focus on racism, prejudice, and the Holocaust. By the 2026-2027 school year, the bill indicates the General Assembly intends to have all county boards of education establish curriculum resources aligned with the new content standards and curriculum standards to be established above.

While the extent is unable to be estimated, any changes to State standards will result in changes to local school system materials as well as time and resources involved in teacher preparation on the new content. Curriculum staff are already inundated with changes from the current 10-year cycle of review by the State. The Grades 6 and 7 Social Studies Framework linked above, for instance, was recently released. Staff also does not believe MSDE has the resources to do the mandated review within a six-month period, nor would local school systems be able to implement resulting changes within six months after MSDE adopts. It is also unclear how some of the topics would be taught as specified. What type of standard would be written to address “torture” for instance? While curriculum might address historical actions of genocide and crimes against humanity, a standard that specifically outlines these topics is not reflective of best practices for either a culturally responsive or trauma informed classroom.

While staff opposes this section of the bill because of both the unfunded mandate and the removal of local discretion, many of the topics outlined are already taught by HCPSS.

At the high school level, the Holocaust and genocide are dealt with in multiple places throughout current HCPSS curriculum. In 9th grade students evaluate the U.S. response to the Holocaust during and after World War II. The 10th grade American Government curriculum includes a performance task on the U.S. response (non-response) to the genocide in Rwanda as a case study of U.S. foreign policy. Students also have an opportunity to evaluate how the genocide in Rwanda impacted Burundi and how governments develop out of global crises. In Modern World History (11th grade) the content standards are very specific and taken from national history standards.

In middle school, teachers often include the Holocaust in the 7th grade unit on modern Europe and the Rwandan genocide in the 6th grade unit on Africa. These are handled with sensitivity to the age and maturity of the students. The 8th grade curriculum (and now assessment limits) includes the American treatment and removal of Native Americans during the Jacksonian Era, which falls into this category.

In elementary school, several lessons focus on “marginalized groups with particular consideration of the associated historical context and root causes of marginalization.” Students study about this marginalization by analyzing the past that begins with the enslavement of Native Americans and Africans. It then continues through the study of the civil rights movement leading to the study of the present struggle to expand civil rights to more people.

For these reasons, we urge an UNFAVORABLE report on SB0916 from this Committee.