



BILL: House Bill 161
TITLE: Primary and Secondary Education – Comprehensive Health Education Framework - Established
HEARING DATE: March 20, 2025
POSITION: OPPOSE
COMMITTEE: Senate Education, Energy, and Environment Committee
CONTACT: Ilissa Ramm, Chief Legal Counsel, 301-766-2946

Washington County Board of Education opposes House Bill 161 that seeks to undermine local control by establishing a state mandated comprehensive health education framework that is duplicative of the already state agency, educator developed framework.

Each year, prior to the Maryland legislative session, Washington County Board of Education adopts a legislative program that sets forth its core values for the upcoming session. As it has done for several years, the Board of Education adopted the core value of local control for the 2025 Maryland legislative session reaffirming its commitment to preserving local autonomy in education policy and ensuring that curriculum decisions are made at the local level. This model best serves students and families while promoting high standards for academic accountability and curriculum tailored to meet the needs of each individual county. Students are best served by having an independent local board of education that is engaged with its superintendent and the school community to discuss and to debate important issues that directly impact the quality of education. The widely recognized success of Maryland schools is a testament to the effectiveness of this governance model which is why the Board of Education opposes any legislation or regulatory initiatives that would have the effect of diminishing local board governance and why it must oppose House Bill 161.

House Bill 161 attempts to legislate curriculum, a responsibility that has always been best developed at the local level using a state department of education approved framework. In fact, House Bill 161 would be duplicative of an already established comprehensive health education framework developed by educators and health experts from across the state for students in prekindergarten through high school that Washington County Board of Education and the other twenty-three school systems use to establish their individual health education curriculums. It is imperative that each local school system remain enabled to develop their own educator developed curriculum, including health education curriculum, which is tailored to meet the needs of their individual county. This flexibility is crucial and should not be eroded by a legislatively established model with no ability to adapt to the needs of students and families.

Furthermore, House Bill 161 attempts to restrict parental rights by altering the existing opt-out provision that is already well established in COMAR (13A.04.18.01) for parents and caregivers to opt their students out of the comprehensive health education instructional program. The Maryland State Department of Education established through COMAR this opt out provision several years ago that gives boards of education local control of the opt out process, honoring parents' preferences in determining what is best for their student's education. House Bill 161 is duplicative and unnecessary, complicating an already effective process.

Washington County Board of Education opposes House Bill 161 and requests the Education, Energy, and Environment Committee to issue an unfavorable report on the basis that it seeks to take away local control from boards of education and is duplicative.

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. Gary Willow, Associate Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction
Mr. Jeffrey Proulx, Chief Operating Officer
Ms. Ilissa Ramm, Chief Legal Counsel
Mr. Brian Dulay, Director of Governmental Relations, Maryland Association of Boards of Education
Ms. Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director, Public School Superintendents' Association of Maryland