

TO: House Ways and Means Committee
BILL: House Bill (HB) 583 – Primary and Secondary Education – Virtual Schools – Alterations
DATE: February 12, 2025
POSITION: Oppose

The Maryland State Board of Education (State Board) and the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) respectfully oppose **HB 583 (Primary and Secondary Education – Virtual Schools – Alterations)**, which would require each local education agency (LEA) in the state to establish a virtual school or collaborate with another LEA to establish one. The proposed legislation also requires each LEA to establish reasonable criteria for student enrollment and an equitable outreach program.

MSDE has established a process to approve virtual schools and/or programs. Applications from twenty-three of the LEAs have been approved. The programs are customized to meet the needs of their students and communities. All applications must include fair and equitable criteria for recruiting and enrolling students. Only two LEAs are operating a virtual school in SY2024-25, and approximately fifteen LEAs are operating a virtual program. Further, collaborative programs have existed in the state such as the Eastern Shore of Maryland Educational Consortium (ESMEC) Virtual Learning Program.

Demand for virtual schools varies widely across the state; mandating the establishment of a virtual school in each LEA would not align with the unique needs in each community. The proposed legislation would have a significant operational and fiscal impact on LEAs and could strain the resources of brick-and-mortar schools. The State Board and MSDE oppose the unfunded mandate on the LEAs.

We respectfully request that you consider this information as you deliberate **HB 583**. Please contact Akilah Alleyne, Ph.D., Executive Director of Government Affairs, akilah.alleyne@maryland.gov or Zach Hands, Executive Director of the State Board, zachary.hands1@maryland.gov for any additional information.