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BILL:	House Bill 1185	DATE:	March 5, 2025
SUBJECT:	Homeschool Students in Maryland – Right to Play	COMMITTEE:	Ways and Means Committee
POSITION:	Information Only		
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EXPLANATION:

The Maryland Public Secondary Schools Athletic Association (MPSSAA) is providing information for consideration regarding House Bill (HB) 1185 – Homeschool Students in Maryland – Right to Play, which requires local educational agencies to allow homeschool students to participate in interscholastic athletic programs.

MPSSAA recognizes the increasing availability of alternatives to traditional schooling for enrolled students. HB 1185 would allow public schools to permit non-enrolled students to participate in interscholastic athletics without requiring them to be officially enrolled. MPSSAA respectfully request that the following considerations be taken into account regarding the potential impact of HB 1185.

HB 1185 specifies that public schools may allow non-enrolled students to participate in extracurricular activities, including athletics, to the same extent as enrolled students. However, this raises concerns, as there are significant differences between the academic requirements—such as grade point averages (GPA), curricula, testing, and course completion—of enrolled students and non-enrolled participants. For generations, local educational agencies have structured athletics, clubs, and other activities to complement the school-based academic environment. These activities help foster school spirit, promote positive school culture, and create an inclusive learning environment for enrolled students. In addition to their teaching and administrative responsibilities, school educators dedicate considerable time and effort to creating and sponsoring these extracurricular activities to enhance students' academic experience and encourage their personal growth. These programs are grounded in student enrollment and are governed by eligibility criteria set by each local educational agency.

The Maryland Code of Regulations (COMAR) 13A.06.03 – "Interscholastic Athletics" – supports education-based athletic programs for over 200 public high schools and more than 118,000 student participants each year. The first eligibility criterion, as stated in the regulations, is that students must be officially registered and attending the school to participate in interscholastic athletics. This requirement is a cornerstone of any interscholastic or intercollegiate athletic eligibility policy, designed to maintain a fair, school-based athletic

program. There are also transfer rules in place to ensure fairness, prevent recruiting, and avoid prioritizing athletics over academics.

The MPSSAA expresses concern that HB 1185 could disrupt equitable participation, encourage improper recruiting, and threaten competitive balance among schools. The MPSSAA currently classifies schools based on enrollment for grades 9 through 11, but the inclusion of non-enrolled students in athletic programs would undermine this system, as non-enrolled students would not be accounted for within local educational agency enrollments. Additionally, HB 1185 does not specify on where homeschool students may participate, potentially allowing them to join multiple schools' athletic teams during a single academic year. In contrast, enrolled students are restricted to participating in athletics at the school they are officially registered with.

Interscholastic athletics are highly competitive. Allowing non-enrolled students to choose which schools they wish to represent could lead to the recruitment of talented athletes solely for the purpose of winning games and championships. Local educational agencies already face challenges in limiting transfers between schools to maintain fairness and prevent the recruitment of "ringers" to boost team performance. In such an environment, the pressure to win could result in a coach selecting a talented non-enrolled athlete over an enrolled student, displacing enrolled students either from the team or reducing their roles and playing time.

The MPSSAA is concerned HB 1185 could lead to a student who faces academic or disciplinary challenges may choose to disenroll from public schools, begin homeschooling, and continue to participate in athletic programs. This could further exacerbate the issue of athletics being prioritized over academics and undermine the focus on appropriate student conduct. School administrators, who are responsible for the safety, education, and overall well-being of their students, would be tasked with overseeing students who are not enrolled in their schools. This adds a layer of complexity to their duties, especially when it comes to ensuring the safety of non-enrolled participants.

Interscholastic athletics play a crucial role in enhancing the overall school experience by encouraging and engaging enrolled students. These extracurricular activities not only support students' academic journey but also provide opportunities for personal growth. Participation in such programs has been shown to improve students' academic performance, attendance, self-esteem, and sense of self-worth. The challenges of maintaining a GPA, meeting curriculum requirements, and preparing for tests are often balanced by the social, emotional, physical, and mental benefits of being involved in extracurriculars.

The MPSSAA respectfully request that you consider this information as you deliberate **HB 1185**. For further information, please contact Andy Warner at 410-767-0376, or Robert.warner1@maryland.gov.