

DAWN D. GILE
Legislative District 33
Anne Arundel County

Finance Committee

Chair

Anne Arundel County
Senate Delegation



Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street, Suite 3 East
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3568 · 301-858-3568
800-492-7122 Ext. 3568
Dawn.Gile@senate.state.md.us

THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony in Support of SB 685

Local School Systems - Sexual Abuse and Sexual Misconduct - Response Policy and After-Action Review

Mr. Chair, Madam Vice Chair, and Members of the EEE Committee:

This legislation was born out of a deeply painful and personal experience in my community involving allegations of sexual misconduct at Severna Park Elementary School. My own children attend that school. The families most directly affected are my neighbors and friends.

I want to be very clear at the outset about what this bill does — and what it does not do.

SB 685 does not relitigate any case. It does not question the outcome of criminal proceedings. It does not assign blame to any individual or to Anne Arundel County Public Schools. Our educators work tirelessly for children every single day. This bill is not about second-guessing dedicated professionals.

What it does address is something more structural.

When credible allegations arise, Maryland currently does not have consistent, statewide minimum standards governing how local school systems respond. Policies vary from county to county. Timelines vary. Notification practices vary. Record retention practices vary. In moments of crisis, that lack of uniformity can compound fear, confusion, and mistrust.

SB 685 is about closing that gap.

First, the bill directs the Maryland State Department of Education to develop a model sexual abuse and sexual misconduct response policy. Each local school system must adopt a policy aligned with that model by July 1, 2027. This creates a clear statewide floor — not a ceiling — ensuring that every child in Maryland is protected by the same minimum standards, while preserving local flexibility to go further if appropriate.

Second, the bill defines what constitutes a “credible allegation.” That definition matters. It requires that the report be specific and plausible and sufficient to warrant protective action. This

ensures that schools act promptly when action is warranted, while also safeguarding employee privacy and due process when allegations are not credible or involve unrelated personnel matters.

Third, SB 685 establishes clear and consistent parent notification standards. When a credible allegation is received, parents must be notified as soon as feasible, and no later than three school days in cases involving alleged child abuse by an employee, unless law enforcement or Child Protective Services requests a delay. The notice must confirm that a credible allegation has been received, indicate whether the employee has been removed from student contact, describe safety measures in place, and provide information about counseling and support resources. At the same time, the employee's name may not be disclosed during an active investigation. That balance is intentional. Transparency and investigative integrity must coexist.

The bill also requires that school systems create a public webpage focused on ensuring families have immediate access to support resources. That webpage must prominently provide information about available counseling services, mental health supports, crisis hotlines, and community-based resources for students and families. In moments of trauma or uncertainty, access to qualified trauma-informed counselors and clear pathways to support can be just as important as procedural updates. Rather than allowing families to search for help on their own during a stressful time, this provision ensures that schools proactively connect parents and students with the services they may need.

Another key lesson from the Severna Park case involved record retention. We learned that electronic communications were subject to automatic deletion under varying local policies. In that instance, a 30-day deletion cycle eliminated emails that could have provided important context. SB 685 requires a minimum three-year retention period for electronic records related to credible allegations. This preserves investigatory integrity, aligns with Maryland's removal of statutes of limitations for child sexual abuse, and ensures that law enforcement and civil processes have access to necessary documentation.

Finally, the bill requires a structured after-action review within 45 days of the conclusion of a serious incident. That review examines how the incident occurred, systemic and environmental factors, gaps in supervision or communication, the timeliness of parent notification, and coordination with law enforcement and Child Protective Services. The purpose is not punishment. It is institutional learning. It ensures that difficult experiences lead to documented improvement rather than a quiet return to normal.

At its core, SB 685 is about consistency, transparency, evidence preservation, and institutional accountability. It establishes statewide minimum standards while respecting local governance and due process protections.

This bill reflects months of consultation with families, educators, state agencies, criminal justice professionals, and policy experts. It is measured. It is balanced. And it responds to a clear gap in our current framework.

For those reasons, I respectfully request a favorable report on SB 685.