

**SB 254 FAV MDHTTF.pdf**

Uploaded by: Amanda Rodriguez

Position: FAV



**BILL NUMBER:** SB 254

**TITLE:** Education - Sexual Abuse and Assault Awareness and Prevention Program - Human and Sex Trafficking

**COMMITTEE:** Education, Energy, and the Environment

**HEARING DATE:** 2/18/2026

**POSITION:** FAV

The Maryland Human Trafficking Task Force (MDHTTF), formed in 2007, is a collaborative of multiple disciplines, including law enforcement, prosecutors, victim service organizations, and state government agencies. The MDHTTF has identified specific opportunities to improve Maryland's human trafficking-related statutes based on over a decade of local and national anti-trafficking experiences, consultation with state-based and federal partners, as well as time spent engaging with stakeholders across the state.

Senate Bill 254 strengthens Maryland's existing Sexual Abuse and Assault Awareness and Prevention Program by requiring that, for students in grades 6 through 8, the curriculum include material promoting the awareness and prevention of human and sex trafficking in both public and participating nonpublic schools. This targeted, age-appropriate expansion recognizes that middle school students are at a critical developmental stage when traffickers may begin grooming and exploitation, especially through online platforms, social media, and peer relationships.

Members of the Task Force routinely work with youth and young adults who were first targeted when they were in middle school, often by individuals who exploited their unmet needs for safety, affection, and stability. Survivors and families frequently report that they did not recognize the signs of trafficking or understand that what they were experiencing was a crime until long after the exploitation began. Integrating trafficking awareness into the health curriculum will help students identify red flags, understand healthy versus exploitative relationships, and know how to seek help for themselves or a peer.

SB 254 also appropriately recognizes the role of both the State Board of Education and nonpublic schools by requiring each to develop and implement age-appropriate programming and to ensure that it is taught by trained teachers within the health curriculum. Embedding trafficking content in

an existing, systemwide program is an efficient, sustainable strategy that promotes consistency across jurisdictions and reduces the risk that critical prevention information will be treated as optional or “extra.” Training for educators further ensures that these sensitive topics are addressed in a trauma-informed, culturally responsive manner that supports, rather than harms, students who may already be experiencing abuse or exploitation.

From the Task Force’s perspective, SB 254 is a vital prevention measure that complements Maryland’s broader efforts to respond to human trafficking through crisis services, law enforcement, and the courts. Prevention education in schools can interrupt trafficking at its earliest stages, reduce the isolation and shame that traffickers rely upon, and increase the likelihood that youth will disclose concerns to a trusted adult. It also sends a clear message that Maryland takes seriously the exploitation of children and adolescents in every community, including those who may not see themselves reflected in stereotypical images of trafficking.

Members of the Maryland Human Trafficking Task Force are willing to serve as a resource to the State Board of Education and local school systems in the development and implementation of this training, including through consultation on best practices and emerging trends in trafficking prevention. We further recommend that the curriculum and related training ultimately be expanded to include students in high school, who also face significant risk of recruitment and exploitation.

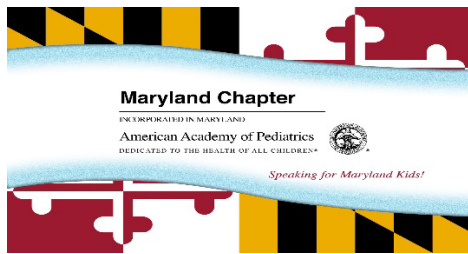
For these reasons, the Maryland Human Trafficking Task Force respectfully urges the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee to issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 254.

For further inquiries, please contact Amanda Rodriguez, Esq., Chair, MDHTTF Legislative Committee, at [arodriguez@turnaroundinc.org](mailto:arodriguez@turnaroundinc.org).

# **SB0254\_FAV\_MDAAP\_Education - Sexual Abuse & Assaul**

Uploaded by: Christine Krone

Position: FAV



Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

February 18, 2026

Senate Bill 254 – *Education – Sexual Abuse and Assault Awareness and Prevention Program – Human and Sex Trafficking*

**POSITION: SUPPORT**

The Maryland Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (MDAAP) is a statewide association representing more than 1,100 pediatricians and allied pediatric and adolescent healthcare practitioners in the State and is a strong and established advocate promoting the health and safety of all the children we serve. On behalf of MDAAP, we submit this letter of **support** for Senate Bill 254.

The bill requires the inclusion of human and sex trafficking awareness and prevention material in education programs for students in grades 6 through 8. Adolescents, particularly those in middle school, are highly vulnerable to trafficking, and early education on the signs of exploitation is crucial in empowering students to protect themselves and seek help. By integrating this content into school curricula, the bill ensures that students will have the knowledge and tools to recognize and report potential trafficking situations.

According to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, approximately one in six runaways reported to them in 2020 were likely to be victims of sex trafficking, with a significant portion of those victims being between the ages of 12 and 17 – an age range that overlaps with middle school-aged youth. Additionally, the Polaris Project, which operates the National Human Trafficking Hotline, reports that youth between the ages of 12 and 17 are particularly vulnerable to trafficking due to their increasing independence and the potential for online exploitation (National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, 2020; Polaris Project, 2021). These statistics highlight the urgent need for educational programs targeting middle school students to help prevent trafficking before it occurs. For these reasons we urge a favorable report.

**For more information call:**

Christine K. Krone  
J. Steven Wise  
Danna L. Kauffman  
Andrew G. Vetter  
410-244-7000

**SB254\_Cross\_Favorable\_Testimony (1).pdf**

Uploaded by: Dr Cashenna A Cross

Position: FAV

## **Testimony in Favor**

### **Senate Bill 254 – Education – Sexual Abuse and Assault Awareness and Prevention Program – Human and Sex Trafficking**

Chair, Vice Chair, and Distinguished Members of the Committee,

My name is **The Honorable, Dr. Cashenna A. Cross**, and I respectfully submit this testimony in strong support of Senate Bill 254. I come before you not only as a municipal leader, but as a United States Air Force veteran, a United Nations Peace Ambassador, and a lifelong advocate for families, youth, and vulnerable populations who too often fall through the cracks of our systems.

Human trafficking is not an abstract issue. It is present in our communities, quietly targeting young people who are searching for belonging, stability, or opportunity. In my work across Maryland — through community engagement, youth mentorship, domestic violence prevention initiatives, and international peace efforts — I have seen how exploitation begins long before law enforcement becomes involved. It begins with grooming, manipulation, and silence.

Senate Bill 254 recognizes a critical truth: prevention must start early. By incorporating human and sex trafficking awareness into existing sexual abuse and assault prevention education for middle school students, Maryland takes a decisive step toward protecting children at the age when traffickers increasingly attempt to make first contact — often online and often disguised as friendship or support.

Education is not about alarming children; it is about equipping them. When students understand boundaries, recognize coercive behavior, and know how to seek help, they gain the power to interrupt exploitation before harm occurs. Teachers, families, and communities cannot protect what they have not been taught to recognize.

During my military service overseas and my continued work in public service at home, I learned that safety is built through awareness and preparation, not reaction alone. The same principle applies here. We must move from responding to trafficking after lives are harmed to preventing it before vulnerability becomes victimization.

This legislation strengthens Maryland's existing framework without creating unnecessary burden. It builds consistency, equips educators, and sends a clear message that protecting children is a shared responsibility across every community and every classroom.

Our young people deserve more than warnings after tragedy. They deserve knowledge before danger. Senate Bill 254 provides that protection.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to issue a **Favorable Report** on Senate Bill 254.

Respectfully submitted,

**The Honorable, Dr. Cashenna A. Cross**  
Councilwoman-at-Large, City of Glenarden  
United Nations Peace Ambassador  
U.S. Air Force Veteran | Municipal Advocate  
■ 571-719-8784

**SB0254 2:18:26 Education Trafficking.pdf**

Uploaded by: Lynn Mortoro

Position: FAV



## **TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB0254**

Education - Sexual Abuse and Assault Awareness and Prevention Program  
- Human and Sex Trafficking

### **FAVORABLE**

**TO: Chair Senator Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair Senator Cheryl C. Kagan and members of the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee.**

**FROM: Lynn Mortoro, member of the Maryland Episcopal Public Policy Network (MEPPN)**

**DATE: February 18, 2026**

**Dear Chair Senator Feldman, Vice Chair Senator Kagan and all members of the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee:**

**Thank you for the opportunity for offering written testimony on this bill.**

I am a retired registered nurse, mother and grandmother. I have always believed in education of my children and believe through education, there is knowledge and awareness. We must educate our children in an age appropriate setting, in schools, about the issues of sexual abuse and trafficking.

The Episcopal Church, through General Convention, has long supported efforts to combat human trafficking.

The church believes in a multi-focal effort, education based on facts is definitely a part of that.

**The Maryland Episcopal Public Policy Network (MEPPN) requests a**

### **FAVORABLE report**

*The Maryland Episcopal Public Policy Network (MEPPN) is a ministry of The Episcopal Diocese of Maryland, The Episcopal Diocese of Washington, and The Delaware-Maryland Synod ELCA*

# **Testimony in support of SB0254 - Education - Huma**

Uploaded by: Richard KAP Kaplowitz

Position: FAV

SB0254\_RichardKaplowitz\_FAV  
02/18/2026  
Richard Keith Kaplowitz  
Frederick, MD 21703

**TESTIMONY ON SB#/0254 – FAVORABLE**

**Education - Sexual Abuse and Assault Awareness and Prevention Program - Human and Sex Trafficking**

**TO:** Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the Education, Energy and the Environment Committee

**FROM:** Richard Keith Kaplowitz

**My name is Richard K. Kaplowitz. I am a resident of District 3. I am submitting this testimony in support of SB#0254, Education - Sexual Abuse and Assault Awareness and Prevention Program - Human and Sex Trafficking**

Maryland statistics show that child sexual abuse is a problem within Maryland.<sup>1</sup>

In 2020, there were 1,365,166 children in Maryland.<sup>1</sup> Of those children, 7,242 were victims of child abuse or neglect. 28.4% of the child abuse or neglect that occurred in Maryland in 2020 was sexual abuse, meaning 2,059 Maryland children experienced sexual abuse. This is an increase of 3.4% from 2019.

The percentage of victims of child sexual abuse in Maryland is significantly higher than the national average of 9%.

The Maryland Human Trafficking Task Force has reported the following:<sup>2</sup>

- Maryland Human Trafficking Task Force (MHTTF) Victim Service Subcommittee members assisted **217** victims of trafficking in 2013
- FBI Child Exploitation Task Force has identified **46** child victims of trafficking in Maryland since January 2013
- MHTTF federal law enforcement partners have identified **200** total victims of trafficking since January 2013
- MHTTF federal law enforcement partners have arrested **94** human traffickers since January 2013
- **23** federal trafficking prosecutions in Maryland since January 2013

The intent of this bill is to equip our youth with the knowledge needed to, on an age-appropriate basis, understand what the problem is and how to recognize it so they can avoid becoming victims to this plague on our society.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://mcasa.org/assets/files/Incidence of CSA Fact Sheet 2021.12.pdf](https://mcasa.org/assets/files/Incidence_of_CSA_Fact_Sheet_2021.12.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.mdhumantrafficking.org/statistics>

SB0254\_RichardKaplowitz\_FAV

This bill establishes an educational framework that requires that a certain program on the awareness and prevention of sexual abuse and assault include, for students in grades 6 through 8, material promoting the awareness and prevention of human and sex trafficking.

We can and must proactively work to equip our children with tools, so they do not fall victim to these scourges. The consequences of inaction to arrest these problems are too terrible to contemplate.

**I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report and pass SB0254.**

**HB355-SB254 Support Written Testimony 02.09.26.pdf**

Uploaded by: Ryan Snow

Position: FAV

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Behavioral Health & Rape Crisis Center  
— *Your Story Matters* —

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Giovanni Wynn

February 9, 2026

The Honorable Jheanelle K. Wilkins  
Chair, Ways and Means Committee  
House Office Building  
6 Bladen Street  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

The Honorable Brian J. Feldman  
Chair, Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee  
Miller Senate Office Building  
11 Bladen Street  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Chair Wilkins, Chair Feldman, and Members of the Committees:

For All Seasons writes in support of HB355/SB254, a common-sense update to Maryland's existing sexual abuse prevention curriculum.

Grades 6–8 represent a critical developmental window. During these years, many Maryland children begin traveling to school independently, using social media with less supervision, and spending more time online. Unfortunately, this is also when young people become more vulnerable to online exploitation and human trafficking.

According to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, 1 in 6 endangered runaways reported in 2023 were likely victims of sex trafficking, with the average age of entry between 12 and 14 years old, precisely the age group covered by this legislation.

HB355/SB254 strengthens student safety by adding age-appropriate trafficking awareness content to an already required abuse-prevention program. More importantly, this can be accomplished without adding instructional time or imposing new costs on local school systems. Maryland's children deserve protection wherever they are and this equips students with knowledge that can help prevent exploitation before it occurs.

For these reasons, For All Seasons respectfully urges a **FAVORABLE** report on HB355/SB254.

Respectfully submitted,

Lauren Kay Weber  
Chief Strategy Officer

# **SB 254 Letter - Support - Education.pdf**

Uploaded by: Taylor Dickerson

Position: FAV



MARYLAND  
PSYCHOLOGICAL  
ASSOCIATION

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RE: SB 254 Education - Sexual Abuse and Assault Awareness and Prevention Program - Human and Sex Trafficking

***Treasurer***

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Position: SUPPORT

***Representatives-at-large***

Deborah Williams, Psy.D.  
Laurie Donze, Ph.D.

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Committee:

***Representative to APA Council***

Mary Fernandes, Ph.D.

The Maryland Psychological Association, (MPA), which represents over 1,000 doctoral level psychologists throughout the state, asks the House Ways and Means Committee to report FAVORABLY on SB 254.

**COMMITTEE CHAIRS**

***Communications***

Beatrice Gerry, Ph.D.

Human trafficking is a \$150 Billion industry, and estimates range from 27-41 million victims worldwide. It does not discriminate on race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic background, and it hides in plain sight. The aim of this bill, is to bring it out of the darkness, so it can no longer hide.

***Diversity***

Mindy Milstein, Ph.D.

Trafficking is able to thrive, because most people do not know how to identify trafficking when they see it. Youth do not know how to identify the red flags that will lure them in to trafficking schemes. Misleading information on social media makes them think traffickers are coming to kidnap them off the streets, but that is rarely the case. Trafficking is a business, and it functions by luring young people in through grooming. Middle-schoolers are the perfect age to be educated about the way traffickers operate, so that they can avoid falling in to their traps. Providing this three-year program will instill accurate and life-saving information into Maryland youth, hopefully preventing them from being lured into a life from which they may never recover.

***Early Career Psychologist***

Danielle Wexler, Ph.D.

***Educational Affairs***

Shalena Wade, Ph.D.

***Ethics***

LaShaun Williams, Psy.D.

We urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on SB 254. If we can be of any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact MPA's Legislative Chair, Dr. Stephanie Olarte, Ph.D. at mpalegislativecommittee@gmail.com.

***Legislative***

Stephanie Olarte, Ph.D.

Respectfully submitted,

***Membership***

Dana O'Brien, Ph.D.

*Stephanie Wolf, JD, Ph.D.*

Stephanie Wolf, JD, Ph.D.

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*Stephanie Olarte, Ph.D.*

Stephanie Olarte, Ph.D.

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cc: Barbara Brocato & Dan Shattuck, MPA Government Affairs

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

Taylor Dickerson

# **Trafficking - education - testimony - 2026 - SB25**

Uploaded by: Lisae C Jordan

Position: FWA



**Working to end sexual violence in Maryland**

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For more information contact:  
Lisae C. Jordan, Esquire  
443-995-5544  
[www.mcasa.org](http://www.mcasa.org)

**Testimony Supporting Senate Bill 254 with Amendments**  
**Lisae C. Jordan, Executive Director & Counsel**  
February 18, 2026

The Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MCASA) is a non-profit membership organization that includes the State's seventeen rape crisis centers, law enforcement, mental health and health care providers, attorneys, educators, survivors of sexual violence and other concerned individuals. MCASA includes the Sexual Assault Legal Institute (SALI), a statewide legal services provider for survivors of sexual assault. MCASA represents the unified voice and combined energy of all of its members working to eliminate sexual violence. We urge the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee to report favorably on Senate Bill 254 with Amendments.

**Senate Bill 254**

**Sexual Abuse & Assault Awareness and Prevention Program, Human and Sex Trafficking**

This bill adds education about "human and sex trafficking" to the currently mandated curricula on awareness and prevention of sexual abuse and assault. The current mandate provides broad guidance at the state level, with additional community specific information developed locally. MCASA and many of its member rape crisis centers across the state have been involved in developing the current sexual abuse and assault prevention curricula; notably, this generally also includes information on consent.

Providing students with information regarding trafficking is an important component of prevention. Stopping the horrific crimes of trafficking must continue to be the responsibility of adults, not children, however education can help empower children and promote resilience. Including age-appropriate information regarding sex trafficking would fit well in current curricula regarding sexual abuse and assault and regarding consent. It is less clear whether labor trafficking would fit into this education and MCASA encourages the Committee to provide local schools flexibility on this point. Additionally, we express concern at limiting the trafficking education to students between 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade. These are smaller details, however, and MCASA fully supports SB254's larger goal of ensuring that students receive information about sex trafficking as part of their education. MCASA also supports the bill provisions requiring that teachers providing this education have the training they need to be effective, and notes that MCASA and other agencies are available to assist with efforts to train educators.

**The Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault urges the  
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee to report favorably  
on Senate Bill 254 with Amendments**

# **SB0254\_WrittenTestimony\_FavorableWithAmendments\_Md**

Uploaded by: Oluwatosin Olateju

Position: FWA



**Mission:** To improve public health in Maryland through education and advocacy **Vision:** Healthy Marylanders living in Healthy Communities

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**WRITTEN TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 254**  
**Education - Sexual Abuse and Assault Awareness and Prevention Program - Human and Sex Trafficking**  
**Committee: Education, Energy, and the Environment**  
**By: Maryland Public Health Association (MdPHA)**  
**Position: Favorable with Amendment**  
**Hearing Date: February 18, 2026**

Chair Brian Feldman, Vice-Chair Keryl Kagan, and members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify in favor of SB 254, requiring that a certain program on the awareness and prevention of sexual abuse and assault include, for students in grades 6 through 8, material promoting the awareness and prevention of human and sex trafficking.

Early adolescence is a documented high-risk period for grooming and exploitation. Middle school students are increasingly exposed to risk through social media and online platforms. Traffickers frequently target middle school-aged youth through manipulation, false relationships, and online contact—methods that mirror sexual abuse dynamics.<sup>1,2</sup> Prevention education that addresses abuse without addressing trafficking leaves a critical gap.

Trafficking education teaches students to recognize grooming, understand consent and boundaries, and identify red flags. Moreover, human trafficking curriculum also provides students with education and empowerment, equipping them with "the awareness, knowledge, and tools necessary to safeguard themselves and others"<sup>1,3</sup> Research has shown that game-based learning is an effective method for increasing children's awareness of both in-person and online grooming. Elementary schools should consider incorporating developmentally appropriate games into trafficking education to help educate and empower students to recognize and prevent sexual grooming.<sup>4</sup> This bill should consider an amendment to permit the inclusion of game-based instructional strategies within sex trafficking education curricula, as such approaches are shown to enhance student engagement and support effective learning outcomes.

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<sup>1</sup> Noll, J.G., Haag, A.C., Shenk, C.E. *et al.* (2022). An observational study of Internet behaviours for adolescent females following sexual abuse. *Nat Hum Behav* 6, 74–87. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-021-01187-5>

<sup>2</sup> Sanchez, S. R. P., & Genelza, G. G. (2025). A systematic literature review on sexual exploitation and abuse of children: prevalence, risk factors, and societal responses. *Universe International Journal of Interdisciplinary Research*, DOI No. – 08.2020-25662434.

<sup>3</sup> Farr, K. (2025). *Insights on the effectiveness of human trafficking curricula for K–8 students* (Order No. 31996368). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (3206155593). Retrieved from <https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/insights-on-effectiveness-human-trafficking/docview/3206155593/se-2>

<sup>4</sup> Hendrick, A. D., Jupit, A. J. R., & Nordin, A. I. (2024). Empowering Youth through Play: Promoting Awareness of Sexual Grooming among Schoolchildren through Game-based Learning. *Journal of Advanced Research in Applied Sciences and Engineering Technology*, 51(2), 34-44.

Trafficking occurs in every community and often involves someone the child knows. Education reduces stigma, increases early reporting, and strengthens protective factors. It empowers students while reinforcing that exploitation is never the victim's fault.

Including trafficking awareness is a logical, trauma-informed extension of sexual abuse prevention—not an expansion into inappropriate content. It equips students with practical safety knowledge at a developmentally appropriate time.

For these reasons, the Maryland Public Health Association urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 254.

Thank you for your consideration.

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The Maryland Public Health Association (MdPHA) is a nonprofit, statewide organization of public health professionals dedicated to improving the lives of all Marylanders through education, advocacy, and collaboration. We support public policies consistent with our vision of healthy Marylanders living in healthy, equitable, communities. MdPHA is the state affiliate of the American Public Health Association, a nearly 145-year-old professional organization dedicated to improving population health and reducing the health disparities that plague our state and our nation.

**Maryland Public Health Association (MdPHA)**  
**PO Box 7045 · 6801 Oak Hall Ln · Columbia, MD 21045-9998**  
**GetInfo@MdPHA.org [www.mdpha.org](http://www.mdpha.org) 443.475.0242**

# **HB 355\_SB 254\_ Education - Sexual Abuse and Assau**

Uploaded by: Trudy Tibbals

Position: FWA

**HB 355/SB 254:** Education - Sexual Abuse and Assault Awareness and Prevention Program - Human and Sex Trafficking: Please vote **TO SUPPORT** this bill with Amendments

Dear Ways & Means and Education, Energy & the Environment Committees:

I am writing to express my **support for HB 355/SB 254**, which establishes a **Sexual Abuse and Assault Awareness and Prevention Program addressing human and sex trafficking** in Maryland schools, **with an important amendment** to ensure the program is **age-appropriate and not overly graphic**.

Educating students about personal safety, exploitation, grooming behaviors, and how to seek help is both **necessary and responsible**. Human and sex trafficking are real threats, and schools play an important role in prevention by equipping students with knowledge, awareness, and trusted reporting pathways.

At the same time, it is essential that this instruction be delivered in a manner that **respects students' developmental stages and family values**. I strongly support an amendment that clearly requires the curriculum to be **non-graphic, trauma-informed, and age-appropriate**, with a focus on **recognition, prevention, and seeking help**, rather than explicit descriptions that could be distressing or inappropriate for younger students.

Clear statutory guidance on content standards will help ensure that the program **protects students without causing unnecessary fear, anxiety, or exposure to explicit material**. Such guardrails also support educators by providing clarity and consistency in how this sensitive subject matter is taught.

With these protections in place, **HB 355/SB 254 strikes an appropriate balance:** raising awareness of serious risks while safeguarding students' well-being and maintaining parental trust in school-based instruction.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to **support HB 355/SB 254 with an amendment requiring non-graphic, age-appropriate instruction**.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.

Respectfully,  
Trudy Tibbals



**SB0254 - State Board & MSDE - Oppose.docx.pdf**

Uploaded by: Donna Gunning

Position: UNF

**TO:** Senate Committee on Education, Energy, and the Environment

**BILL:** Senate Bill 0254 - Education - Sexual Abuse and Assault Awareness and Prevention Program - Human and Sex Trafficking

**DATE:** February 18, 2026

**POSITION:** Oppose

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The Maryland State Board of Education (State Board) and the State Department of Education (MSDE) respectfully oppose **SB 254**, which would require Maryland's Local Education Agencies (LEAs) and non-public schools that receive textbook and technology grants to incorporate instructional materials for students in grades 6 through 8 that promote the awareness of human and sex trafficking in their health education curriculum.

The State Board and MSDE do not oppose this legislation on the merits of the identified curricular content, but on the grounds that the legislative requirement would be duplicative of current regulatory requirements and would run counter to the process entrusted to the State Board, MSDE, and LEAs. This position is consistent with our adopted legislative platform, which opposes statutory mandates on curriculum.

The State Board and MSDE have a structured and collaborative process for reviewing, revising, and adopting standards, frameworks, and curricular resources, which was reaffirmed on January 23, 2024. This process ensures that all curriculum updates are age-appropriate, scientifically based, medically accurate, and data-driven, and developed in collaboration between the State Board, MSDE, the Maryland Department of Health, LEAs, and community members through the Standards and Frameworks Validation Committee (SFVC).

As part of this process, the Comprehensive Health Education SFVC began its review of Code of Maryland Regulation (COMAR) 13A.04.18.02 and the Comprehensive Health Education Framework in July 2024. Draft revisions were [published](#) in November 2025 and are currently open for public comment, with adoption tentatively scheduled for the State Board's February 24, 2026, meeting.

**SB 254** would unnecessarily disrupt this ongoing work, creating redundancies and potentially delaying timely updates. Moreover, the existing and proposed Comprehensive Health Education Framework—aligned with the National Health Education Standards—already addresses age-appropriate, scientifically based, medically accurate, and data-driven instruction on critical topics such as sexual mistreatment, grooming, harassment, abuse, assault, exploitation, and human trafficking.

Compliance with these requirements is further ensured through COMAR 13A.04.18.02, which mandates that local superintendents certify that health education instruction meets, at a minimum, the standards set forth in the Comprehensive Health Education Framework.

The State Board and MSDE respectfully request that you consider this information as you deliberate **SB 254**. Please contact Laurel Cratsley, Interim Executive Director of Government Affairs, at [laurel.cratsley@maryland.gov](mailto:laurel.cratsley@maryland.gov) for any additional information.

**SB254 OPPOSE.pdf**

Uploaded by: Grace Wilson

Position: UNF



**SB0254 – EDUCATION – SEXUAL ABUSE AND ASSAULT AWARENESS AND PREVENTION  
PROGRAM – HUMAN AND SEX TRAFFICKING**

February 18, 2026

EDUCATION, ENERGY, AND THE ENVIRONMENT

**OPPOSE**

Grace Wilson, Director of Legislation & Policy (410.440.1758)

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Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS) opposes **SB0254 – Education – Sexual Abuse and Assault Awareness and Prevention Program – Human and Sex Trafficking**. This bill amends the requirements that the State Board of Education and each nonpublic school develop and implement a program of age-appropriate education, awareness, and prevention of sexual abuse and assault to include, for students in grades 6 through 8, material promoting the awareness and prevention of human and sex trafficking.

Maryland schools provide their students with a comprehensive Pre-K–12 health education curriculum that focuses on a student’s development of protective life skills and promotes health and well-being. As part of this comprehensive health education curriculum, students are educated in Family Life and Human Sexuality as well as Safety and Violence Prevention. Students participate in age-appropriate instruction on the awareness and prevention of sexual abuse and assault. This instruction includes age-appropriate instruction on human trafficking.

While this legislation is well-intentioned, AACPS opposes efforts by the General Assembly to legislate local public-school curriculum or assessments. The authority to establish curriculum and assessments is the domain of the State Board of Education and the local boards of education; the same entities charged with the responsibility to research, investigate, and evaluate both curriculum and assessments. Maintaining this authority with the State Board and local boards allows local boards of education to collaborate with the State and stakeholders to ensure that all students, schools, and school systems are held accountable.

Accordingly, AACPS respectfully requests an **UNFAVORABLE** committee report on SB0254.

# **SB 254 - Oppose - Sexual Abuse and Assault Awarene**

Uploaded by: Jessica Goff

Position: UNF



621 Ridgely Avenue, Suite 300, Annapolis, Maryland 21401  
410-841-5414 · 800-841-8197 · Fax: 410-841-6580 · MABE.org

**BILL:** Senate Bill 254  
**TITLE:** Education - Sexual Abuse and Assault Awareness and Prevention Program - Human and Sex Trafficking  
**HEARING DATE:** February 18, 2026  
**POSITION:** UNFAVORABLE  
**COMMITTEE:** Education, Energy, and the Environment  
**CONTACT:** Jessica Goff, Governmental Affairs Associate (jgoff@mabe.org)

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE), representing all 24 local boards of education in Maryland, **opposes Senate Bill 254 Education - Sexual Abuse and Assault Awareness and Prevention Program - Human and Sex Trafficking.**

Senate Bill 254 would require that the existing mandatory program on sexual abuse and assault taught in local school systems now include, for students in grades 6 through 8, material promoting the awareness and prevention of human and sex trafficking.

While SB 254 is well-intentioned, MABE opposes efforts by the General Assembly to legislate local public school curriculum. The authority to establish curriculum and assessments is the domain of the State Board of Education and the local boards of education, the same entities charged with the responsibility to research, investigate, and evaluate both curriculum and assessments. The State Board and the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) have an established process for reviewing, revising, and adopting standards, frameworks, and curricular resources. This process ensures that all curriculum updates are evidence-based, age-appropriate, and developed in collaboration between the State Board, MSDE, the Maryland Department of Health, LEAs, and community members through the Standards and Frameworks Validation Committee (SFVC).

MSDE's Comprehensive Health Education Framework, aligned with the 2nd edition of the National Health Education Standards, addresses age-appropriate topics related to sexual mistreatment, grooming, harassment, abuse, assault, exploitation, and human trafficking. Moreover, compliance with the framework is enforced through COMAR 13A.04.18.02, which requires local superintendents to certify that health education instruction meets, at a minimum, the requirements of the Comprehensive Health Education Framework. SB 254's mandate adding specific topics on human and sex trafficking, while well intentioned, ignores the established process for selecting age-appropriate, evidence-based health education curriculum.

For these reasons, MABE believes that the General Assembly should refrain from curricular mandates and requests an **unfavorable report on SB 254.**

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**Informational- SB254/HB355**  
Laura Bogley, J.D., Executive Director  
Maryland Right to Life

### **We Seek Your Amendment of SB254/HB355**

Maryland Right to Life will champion any sincere effort to prevent sex trafficking, particularly of minor children. We applaud the bills' sponsors for their good intentions.

However, we cannot support any policy that authorizes abortion businesses and activists to peddle their deadly wares to vulnerable school children. Without a specific amendment to prohibit state or county contracts with abortion providers or abortion-invested organizations, like Planned Parenthood, Advocates for Youth or the National Women's Law Center (Women's Law Center of Maryland), this bill would expand the reach of the abortion industry to school-aged children during the school day without the knowledge or consent of parents, exacerbating existing abortion coercion in our schools.

Article: [Planned Parenthood Killed Jeffrey Epstein Baby to Hide Sexual Abuse](#)

**The abortion industry contributes to sexual trafficking and cannot be trusted with the care of Maryland school children.** Planned Parenthood has demonstrated that they are unwilling to report suspected child abuse, rape and sexual trafficking to law enforcement authorities as required by law as Mandatory Reporters of suspected abuse. Instead they shield sexual predators and enable them to continue to victimize women and children. The Maryland General Assembly has further subjected pregnant women and girls to harm by enacting a series of Abortionist Shield laws, which deny legal remedy to women and girls trafficked into Maryland for abortion purposes, or exposed to dangerous chemical abortions through interstate telabortion.

The abortion industry also is compensated by the State to develop and contribute to the formulation of the **Maryland Health Education Framework** and in particular the radical *sexuality education* curriculum that they have imposed on local school districts. Parents only authorized schools to instruct children on the science of human biology and reproduction. However, the approved state curriculum, instructs elementary aged children in radical and experimental sex acts without sufficient informed consent about the risks and consequences.

The abortion industry's self-serving curricula are *neither medically accurate nor age appropriate*. It is an egregious conflict of interest for the State to empower the abortion industry, which profits from unplanned pregnancies, to be entrusted to instruct schoolchildren on matters of reproductive health, and especially sex trafficking. Elective abortion is not healthcare, is hostile to human reproduction and should not be a standard part of school instruction.

### **Maryland School Health Curriculum is Neither Medically Accurate Nor Age Appropriate**

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists recommends that sexuality education be medically accurate, evidence-based and age-appropriate. They also recommend that sex ed include the benefits of delaying sexual intercourse and preventing unintended pregnancies.

But Maryland law does not require sex education curriculum to be medically accurate nor age appropriate. Maryland law also was changed to discourage parental involvement by denying parental consent for children to participate in sex ed programs and only permit parents to “opt out” of participation –IF they are notified by the school at all.

When proposed changes in Maryland law related to the content of the Maryland Health Education Framework repeatedly failed due to public outcry, the Maryland General Assembly unethically pushed through the bill by denying Maryland citizens their Constitutionally-guaranteed rights to freedom of speech, due process, equal protection and right to redress by denying a public hearing on the bill. The fact that a previous bill was heard and failed in a previous session, does not justify denying citizens their right to be heard on a new bill introduced in a subsequent session.

### **Maryland Department of Health Subjects Children to Predatory Practices**

The State of Maryland is derelict in its duty to provide a safe learning environment for school children. Instead, the state has undermined parental rights and given abortion-invested activists unfettered access to school children using taxpayers dollars to promote radical sexual indoctrination and abortion activism in our schools.

The Maryland Department of Education works under the guidance of the Maryland Department of Health in developing school-based reproductive health curriculum and programs. The Maryland Department of Health has demonstrated strong abortion bias, by routinely contracting with abortion providers including **Planned Parenthood** and associated organizations like the **National Women's Law Center** and **Advocates for Youth** to develop school policy and training programs, while excluding the participation of any organization that does not promote or perform abortion.

As a rule, the State denies any contracts or memoranda of understanding to reproductive health providers who do not commit or refer women for elective abortions. The State has adopted an arbitrary and medically inaccurate definition of “comprehensive reproductive care” which requires participation in elective abortion practices to qualify for public funding.

The ongoing contractual relationship between the Maryland Department of Health, and the Maryland Department of Education with organizations that profit from abortion, including Planned Parenthood, the National Women’s Law Center and Advocates for Youth, is a conflict of interest that allows the predatory abortion industry to target children in Maryland schools.

### **Predatory Abortion Practices in Maryland Schools**

Current and former Planned Parenthood employees have reported that Planned Parenthood and their network of abortion supporters, use sex education, family planning programming and adoption referrals as “catchment systems” to gain access to pregnant women and girls in order to increase their abortion profits.

In their 2020 Annual Report, Planned Parenthood reports that it is a \$2 billion abortion industry that continues to increase its market share in abortion while their prenatal care, family planning and adoption referral services are minimal and continue to decline.

Both Planned Parenthood and Advocates for Youth have reported revenues received from providing training in Maryland public schools.

Advocates for Youth are funded by Planned Parenthood and public tax dollars. As part of their sexuality education curriculum beginning in kindergarten, Advocates for Youth promotes gender fluidity, radical sexuality, puberty blockers, and global access to abortion for minor children including the exclusion of all parental rights in their minor children’s reproductive healthcare decisions. Advocates for Youth recently launched a youth initiative to defund the police and invest instead in “reproductive justice” through sex education.

The Maryland Department of Health has empowered Advocates for Youth by including them in the development of standards for **Maryland School-Based Health Centers (SBHC’s)**. Maryland SBHC’s already operate outside parental consent by distributing and implanting birth control, subjecting minor children to abortion counseling and referral, and in some cases providing or coordinating transportation to abortion clinics during the school day with approved medical absences – *all without parental knowledge or consent*.

The Maryland Department of Health delegates the task of managing SBHC’s to the Maryland Council on the Advancement of School Based Health Centers. The Council enters into partnerships with a variety of **third party stakeholders**. The statute requires membership of the Council to include the President and three designated representatives of the Maryland Assembly on School Based Health Care, who is represented in Annapolis by Planned Parenthood lobbyist, Robyn Elliott. Delegate Bonnie Cullison of Montgomery County, who sponsored the bill to create the Council and several bills related to SBHC’s serves as an ex officio member of the Council. There is no pro-life representation on the Council.

### **National Women’s Law Center Invested in Abortion**

The National Women’s Law Center (NWLC) (State affiliate: Women’s Law Center of Maryland) promotes abortion in Maryland schools. The NWLC also manages the **Abortion**

**Access Legal Defense Fund** funding litigation for abortion providers and organizations, including shielding abortionists from the law.

As of January 26, 2026, the **National Women's Law Center (NWLC)** materials—specifically the "**Let Her Learn**" and "**Stopping School Pushout**" reports—serve as the primary ideological and legal foundation for Maryland's mandatory training for school personnel.

While Maryland does not typically provide direct, unrestricted state grants to the NWLC (which is a national 501(c)(3) based in DC), it "funds" the implementation of their materials through the procurement of training services and the adoption of their specific policy frameworks.

The NWLC is a **\$41 million organization** (as of FY 2024/2025) that primarily receives funding from massive private foundations (e.g., **Ford Foundation, JPB Foundation, and W.K. Kellogg Foundation**). However, Maryland state funds are connected to them in three specific ways:

- **Indirect Training Fees:** When local school boards hire consulting firms or specialized legal trainers to conduct Title IX workshops, those trainers frequently use **NWLC-licensed toolkits**. A portion of the professional development budget in Maryland counties is effectively paying for the dissemination of this intellectual property.
- **Expert Witness and Policy Consulting:** The Maryland General Assembly and MSDE utilize NWLC staff as "unpaid" expert witnesses. While they are not paid a "salary" by Maryland, their presence in Annapolis is funded by their national donor base to ensure Maryland laws mirror NWLC's model policies.
- **Legal Defense Fund:** The NWLC manages the **Abortion Access Legal Defense Fund**. While separate from high school training, this fund is often a secondary resource for the same "Benefit Navigators" in schools who are being trained under the same legislative umbrella.

### **Parental Notice and Consent Provides Better Outcomes for Minor Children.**

Parents also must know that Maryland law recognizes the natural and legal right of parents to provide consent to their minor child's medical care with one exception – abortion. While state law requires parental notice for abortion procedures, the state has empowered the person profiting from the abortion to waive that requirement. The influence of the abortion industry in developing school policy and curriculum has degraded the role of parents in their children's healthcare decisions. Furthermore, the lack of parental notification puts children at greater risk of undiagnosed and untreated abortion complications and enables abortion providers to evade liability for failure to report child abuse, sexual assault and sex trafficking. We know that

### **No Public Subsidies to Billion Dollar Abortion Industry**

A recent Marist poll showed that 83% of Americans polled favor laws that protect both the lives of women and unborn children, and that 54% oppose the use of tax dollars to pay for abortion. Taxpayers should not be forced to fund elective abortions, which make up the vast majority of abortions performed in Maryland. *Public funds instead should be prioritized to fund legitimate*

*health and family planning services which have the objective of saving the lives of both mother and children.*

### **Parental Notice and Consent Provides Better Outcomes for Minor Children**

State and Federal law recognize the natural and legal right of parents to provide consent to their minor child's medical care. The State of Maryland, through the Department of Education has been entrusted by parents with the academic instruction of Maryland children. The state has far exceeded its limited authority to act in place of the parents during the school day, particularly in the matter of student health.

The influence of the abortion industry in developing school policy and curriculum has degraded the role of parents in their children's healthcare decisions. Parents no longer have the opportunity to "opt in" to sex education for our children, but may only "opt out" if we are made aware at all. In some school jurisdictions, parents were being denied the right to opt out their children and were forced to seek judicial relief.

Minor girls can give consent to abortion at the age of 16. Children may consent to behavioral health services, which may include referral to abortion providers or puberty blocking drugs and counseling, as young as 12. The lack of parental notification puts children at greater risk of undiagnosed and untreated medical complications and enables predatory providers to evade liability for failure to report child abuse, sexual assault and sex trafficking.

### **CONCLUSION**

The state must put public health before politics and ensure our schoolchildren are guarded against sex trafficking, abortion coercion and related inappropriate and inaccurate education. Because of the correlation between the abortion industry and sex trafficking, the State cannot entrust parties invested in abortion with the instruction of Maryland schoolchildren regarding reproductive health and the related the risks of sex trafficking.

For this reason we urge the Committee to amend this bill to exclude participation by abortion organizations and promoters in developing or implementing curricula and programs on the issue of sex trafficking. Reliable alternatives are available and should be prioritized.

**Laura Bogley-Knickman, J.D.**

Executive Director

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**INFORMATIONAL**

**Senate Bill 254**

**Education - Sexual Abuse and Assault Awareness and Prevention Program - Human and Sex Trafficking**

**Senate Committee on Education, Energy, and the Environment  
February 18, 2026**

**Lauren Lamb  
Government Relations**

The Maryland State Education Association offers this informational testimony on Senate Bill 254, which would require that health curricula on the awareness and prevention of sexual abuse and assault include, for students in grades 6 through 8, material promoting the awareness and prevention of human and sex trafficking.

MSEA represents 76,000 educators and school employees who work in Maryland's public schools, teaching and preparing our almost 900,000 students so they can pursue their dreams. MSEA also represents 44 local affiliates in every county across the state of Maryland, and our parent affiliate is the 3-million-member National Education Association (NEA).

MSEA tenaciously advocates for the policies and programs that will give our students access to the resources they need to achieve their full potential. We understand clearly that the health and safety of our students has a direct impact on their academic and non-academic outcomes. However, MSEA has a longstanding concern about legislatively mandating curriculum. We believe that it is the purview of the MSDE and the State Board of Education to develop and implement curriculum standards to meet the academic needs of the students served in Maryland's public schools. It is then the responsibility of local districts to determine how best to implement a program of study that best serves the needs of their students.

We appreciate the intent of this legislation and the importance of the subject matter proposed. However, adding content to the health curriculum raises concern about the amount of content already required to be covered, especially given that the course is only a ½ credit course, and how new subjects could best be incorporated. We believe that local boards and educators— particularly those who are health educators, mental and behavioral health educators, and health practitioners embedded within our schools— are best suited to address this issue and to determine how best to include it into their current required course content.