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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**March 10, 2026**

**HB1168 – Local School Systems – Sexual Abuse and Sexual Misconduct – Response Policy  
and After-Action Review**

Good afternoon, Madame Chair, Madame Vice Chair, and members of the Ways and Means Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to present House Bill 1168.

If you have driven through Severna Park in the past nine months, you may have noticed something striking. In front yards, outside businesses, and along major roads, bright pink signs have appeared across the community displaying the messages “We Believe Them,” “We Stand With Our Girls,” and “End Child Sex Abuse.”<sup>1</sup> These signs began appearing after the highly publicized case involving allegations of abuse at Severna Park Elementary School, as parents and community members placed them outside their homes and businesses to show support for the children who testified and the families affected by the case.

In 2024, a third-grade teacher at Severna Park Elementary School was arrested after multiple students accused him of sexual abuse.<sup>2</sup> The case went to trial in 2025 and resulted in acquittals on most charges, but it had a significant impact on the community.<sup>3</sup> Families held demonstrations, additional parents later came forward with allegations, and many residents called for clearer policies and stronger protections.<sup>4</sup> Whatever one’s view of the legal outcome, the case raised serious concerns about how schools communicate with families and respond when serious allegations arise. House Bill 1168 is intended to address those concerns.

HB 1168 establishes a statewide framework for how schools respond when there are credible allegations of sexual abuse or sexual misconduct involving school employees, contractors, or volunteers. The bill does four main things:

1. WBAL-TV. “Signs of support appear for children alleging abuse in Severna Park case.” <https://www.wbalv.com/article/signs-support-children-sex-abuse-victims-possible-legal-action/65617237>
2. Anne Arundel County Police Department. “Police arrest Severna Park Elementary School teacher on child sexual abuse charges.” <https://www.aacounty.org/police-department/about-us/news/police-press-release-may-16-2024>
3. WBAL-TV. “Jury reaches verdict in Severna Park teacher Matthew Schlegel sexual abuse trial.” <https://www.wbalv.com/article/matthew-schlegel-child-sex-abuse-trial-verdict/65076576>
4. CBS Baltimore. “Community reacts after Severna Park teacher acquitted of most charges.” <https://www.cbsnews.com/baltimore/news/anne-arundel-severna-park-elementary-teacher-allegations>

1. It requires the Maryland State Department of Education to develop a model response policy for handling credible allegations of sexual abuse or misconduct. Each local school system must adopt a policy based on that model.
2. It requires school systems to notify parents or guardians as soon as feasible when a credible allegation of abuse or misconduct is received.
3. School systems must maintain a time-stamped webpage with non-identifying updates and support resources related to serious incidents.
4. It requires school systems to conduct an after-action review within 45 days after a child sexual abuse or misconduct case, or other serious incident, concludes.

Parents trust that when they send their children to school, they will be safe. Maryland already has strong laws requiring educators and other professionals to report suspected child abuse to law enforcement and child protective services. However, those laws mainly address reporting requirements, not how school systems communicate with families or evaluate their responses after an incident.

House Bill 1168 helps address that gap by outlining clear expectations for parent notification, transparency, and after-action review so school systems can learn from serious incidents and improve their response. For Maryland families, that means better communication, stronger accountability, and safer schools.

Maryland would not be alone in passing laws to protect its students. In 2025, Washington State enacted House Bill 1296, which requires school districts to notify parents within 48 hours when a student is alleged to be the victim of sexual misconduct by a school employee.<sup>5</sup> The law was designed to ensure that families receive timely information and to improve the process by which schools respond to these incidents. House Bill 1168 builds on that principle while also requiring after-action reviews so school systems can evaluate and improve their responses.

Research also supports the need for clear institutional policies when schools respond to allegations of abuse. A 2025 study published in the journal *Child Abuse & Neglect* found that many educators report a lack of well-defined procedures and guidance when responding to allegations of sexual abuse.<sup>6</sup> The researchers concluded that schools need structured response frameworks and consistent policies to ensure allegations are handled appropriately and that students are protected.<sup>6</sup>

The fiscal and policy note states that the Maryland State Department of Education would be responsible for developing the model response policy and assisting local school systems with implementation. These responsibilities are estimated to cost approximately \$85,700 in fiscal year 2027 and \$24,800 in fiscal year 2028, primarily to support a contractual staff position. Local school systems may incur some administrative or technology costs related to policy development, communication systems, and maintaining the required webpages, though those costs will vary by district.

5. Washington State Legislature. House Bill 1296 (2025) – School employee sexual misconduct parent notification requirements. <https://lawfilesexternal.wa.gov/biennium/2025-26/Pdf/Bill%20Reports/House/1296-S.E%20HBR%20PL%2025.pdf>

6. Child Abuse & Neglect. “Child protection and child sexual abuse prevention in schools: Self-assessment and external assessment of school professionals’ educational needs.” <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2950193825001536>

House Bill 1168 strengthens communication, transparency, and accountability when serious allegations arise in our schools.

For these reasons, I urge the Committee to stand with Maryland's children, take decisive action, and send a clear message that the safety and well-being of our students are a top priority. Please give House Bill 1168 a favorable report and help us ensure safe, accountable schools for every child.

1. WBAL-TV. "Signs of support appear for children alleging abuse in Severna Park case."  
<https://www.wbalv.com/article/signs-support-children-sex-abuse-victims-possible-legal-action/65617237>
2. Anne Arundel County Police Department. "Police arrest Severna Park Elementary School teacher on child sexual abuse charges."  
<https://www.aacounty.org/police-department/about-us/news/police-press-release-may-16-2024>
3. WBAL-TV. "Jury reaches verdict in Severna Park teacher Matthew Schlegel sexual abuse trial."  
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