



Committee: Ways and Means

Bill Number: House Bill 163 – County Boards of Education – Student Technology Use Policy – Requirements

Hearing Date: February 5, 2026

Position: Support

On behalf of the **Maryland School Counselor Association (MSCA)**, which represents school counselors across Maryland who work daily to promote student success academically, socially, and emotionally, we respectfully submit testimony **in support of HB 358**.

HB 358 provides a sales and use tax exemption for books and related items sold at in-person book fairs held by elementary and secondary schools or associated nonprofit parent-teacher organizations.

School counselors work daily with students whose academic performance, confidence, and engagement are directly influenced by their access to reading materials. Book fairs are an important literacy tool within school communities. They encourage students to explore books aligned with their interests, foster excitement about reading, and provide opportunities for families to engage in their child’s learning. For many students—particularly those from low-income households—school book fairs may be one of the few opportunities to purchase and own books.

The cost of books can be a barrier for families, and even small price increases due to sales tax can discourage participation. By removing the sales and use tax from book fair purchases, HB 358 helps ensure that more students can access books regardless of family income. Increased access to books supports reading proficiency, which is strongly linked to academic achievement across all subject areas and is a critical factor in closing opportunity gaps.

From a school counseling perspective, literacy is also tied to students' social-emotional development. Reading supports vocabulary development, self-expression, empathy, and emotional regulation. Access to diverse and age-appropriate books allows students to see themselves reflected in literature and to better understand others, contributing to a positive school climate and student well-being.

HB 358 represents a practical and equitable policy choice that supports students, families, and schools without placing additional administrative burdens on local school systems. By making book fair purchases more affordable, the bill strengthens school-based literacy efforts and aligns with Maryland's broader educational goals.

For these reasons, MSCA urges a **favorable report on HB 358**. If you have any questions, please contact Jocelyn I. Collins at jcollins@policypartners.net.