
TO: House Ways and Means Committee

BILL: House Bill (HB) 1274 – Education – Posthumous Diploma Awards – Authorized

DATE: March 11, 2026

POSITION: Support

The Maryland State Board of Education (State Board) and the State Department of Education (MSDE) support House Bill (HB) 1274, which authorizes local school systems to award posthumous diplomas under specified circumstances. MSDE recognizes the bill’s intent to provide a compassionate, clearly defined framework for honoring students who were members of their school community at the time of their passing.

House Bill 1274 authorizes, upon written request from a parent, guardian, or next of kin, the award of a standard high school diploma to a deceased Grade 12 student who was enrolled in a public high school, in good academic standing, and reasonably expected to complete graduation requirements during the academic year. The bill also authorizes local school systems to award a posthumous honorary diploma or an in-memoriam diploma to other deceased students, subject to locally determined criteria. Importantly, the legislation clarifies that ceremonial diplomas do not confer academic rights or benefits and may not be included in graduation rate calculations.

MSDE supports HB1274 because it appropriately balances compassion and accountability. The bill preserves the integrity of Maryland’s graduation requirements by distinguishing between a standard diploma and ceremonial recognitions, ensuring that earned diplomas remain aligned to academic standards. By excluding posthumous awards from graduation-rate calculations, the legislation ensures that recognition of deceased students does not affect statewide accountability metrics.

The loss of a student is deeply felt by classmates, educators, and the broader school community. Schools serve as central places of belonging for young people, and when a student passes away, the grief extends far beyond the classroom. Establishing a clear process for posthumous recognition allows school communities to honor the student’s place among their peers while offering a meaningful gesture of remembrance and support to families.

The bill also appropriately assigns implementation authority at the local level, allowing school systems to establish clear processes, determine credit thresholds where applicable, and respond to family requests in a manner that reflects community values while maintaining statewide guardrails. The Department anticipates providing routine guidance to local school systems as needed to support consistent interpretation of the statute.

The State Board and MSDE extend their support to **HB1274** and appreciate the General Assembly’s consideration of legislation that honors students and families while maintaining the integrity of Maryland’s diploma and accountability systems. For further information, please contact Laurel Cratsley, Interim Executive Director of Government Affairs, at laurel.cratsley@maryland.gov.