



POSITION STATEMENT

Bill: HB 73 Public Schools – Water Safety and Swimming Course – Established

Position: Support

Date: February 25, 2026

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Dear Chair Jheanelle K. Wilkins,

The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC or “the Commission”) Prince George’s County Planning Board has voted to support this bill.

What this Bill Does. This bill requires the State Board of Education to develop curriculum content standards for a course on water safety and swimming for public school students in certain grades. It also requires county boards of education to implement the water safety and swimming course for students in certain grades in certain schools in the county. It requires each county board to ensure the provision of reasonable accommodations necessary to provide students with disabilities equal opportunity to participate, to the fullest extent possible, in the water safety and swimming course.

Prince George’s County Parks and Recreation Support for Water Safety. M-NCPPC’s Department of Parks and Recreation has worked with Prince George’s County Public School System since 2011 to provide free water safety education and in-water introductory swim lessons for second grade students at select schools (primarily Title I schools) throughout the County. Our goal has been to increase awareness on the importance of safe behavior in, on, or around water and to introduce in-water safety skills. **We have successfully served over 22,000 students in our Make a Splash in School program. We are inspired and encouraged by Delegate Karen Toles’ efforts to incorporate life-saving water safety information and learn to swim curriculum (where possible) into school curriculums, especially as we work collectively to develop water safe communities.**

Water Safety Data and Research. Research has shown that minorities (e.g., African American and Hispanic/Latino) are at most risk for drowning and water-related injuries and incorporating water safety education into school curriculums is the responsible thing to do for students throughout the State of Maryland. Water safety education does not have to take place at a swimming pool. There are curriculums offered by organizations such as the American Red Cross that provide land-based water safety lessons, videos, and activities that focus on water safety messaging for K-5 grades. School systems can use established water safety curriculums if they align with education standards or water safety curriculum can be developed independently.

Supporting Efforts for School Age Students. The Prince George's County Parks and Recreation Department is very interested in supporting efforts to allow kindergarten to eighth grade students to substitute swimming lessons for physical education courses credited with the goal of teaching young people how to swim and preparing them for possible employment opportunities as lifeguards and swim lesson instructors. This is a win-win solution for school systems and local Parks and Recreation Departments to have more students participate in learn-to-swim classes and to build a workforce from communities that we are already serving.

Flexibility to Develop Land based Water Safety. We do not believe the intent of Delegate Toles' bill is to require County School Systems to build and operate swimming pools. The way the bill has been written allows school systems the flexibility to develop land-based water safety curriculum/courses and to supplement this education, where possible, to include in-water swimming lessons if aquatic facilities are within reasonable proximity to schools/students. Additionally, making swim classes an option to substitute physical education requirements for kindergarten to eighth grade students, allows families to opt into this process if there are means of accessing aquatic facilities to complete swimming lessons.

Therefore, the Prince George's County Planning Board, urges this Committee to vote favorably on this bill.