Maryland
STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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TO: House Committee on Ways & Means

BILL: SB0685 - Local School Systems - Sexual Abuse and Sexual Misconduct - Response Policy and After-Action Review

DATE: April 1, 2026

POSITION: Information

The Maryland State Board of Education (State Board) and the State Department of Education (MSDE) provide this information on SB 685 - Local School Systems - Sexual Abuse and Sexual Misconduct - Response Policy and After-Action Review. SB 685 requires MSDE to create a model policy for responding to school-related allegations of sexual abuse or misconduct in schools. Local education agencies (LEAs) must adopt a policy that is aligned with the State model policy by September 1, 2027. The policy must include a communications plan, a record retention policy, a requirement to link to a central resources platform, and an after-action review plan.

MSDE recognizes the importance of this work, and supports the sponsor's intent of this legislation. Ensuring student safety and assisting LEAs in responding appropriately to allegations of abuse is a core priority for the Department. This work is critical and must be done thoughtfully, using best practices and informed by subject-matter expertise to strike the necessary balance of not revictimizing harmed individuals and notifying school communities of school-related allegations of sexual abuse and misconduct.

To meet this difficult balance of developing a comprehensive, high-quality model policy on a sensitive and complex issue, the Department will require significant time and resources. While MSDE staff have experience in areas such as trauma-informed practices and identifying potential indicators of abuse, the Department would seek to contract with subject-matter experts to support development of an evidence-based, research-informed model policy. This will require further coordination with external partners and stakeholders beyond those named in the legislation to ensure the policy includes clear, effective, and practical guidance.

The timeline established in the bill presents an additional challenge. To meet the September 1, 2027, deadline for LEA adoption, MSDE must complete stakeholder engagement, drafting, legal review, and the creation of the resource hub before securing State Board approval by the winter of the 2026-2027 school year. This process must be completed in time to allow LEAs to undertake their own local review and board approval processes. Given the scope of work, the sensitivity of the subject matter, and the need for expert-informed, trauma-responsive guidance, MSDE will require additional support to meet the bill's requirements within the proposed timeframe.

MSDE respectfully requests consideration of these comments as **SB0685** is discussed and deliberated. For further information, please contact Laurel Cratsley at laurel.cratsley@maryland.gov.