

MARY BETH CAROZZA

*Legislative District 38
Somerset, Wicomico,
and Worcester Counties*

Education, Energy, and
the Environment Committee

Executive Nominations Committee



Annapolis Office

James Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street, Room 316
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3645 • 301-858-3645
800-492-7122 Ext. 3645

Fax 410-841-3006 • 301-858-3006
MaryBeth.Carozza@senate.state.md.us

THE SENATE OF MARYLAND

ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

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The House Ways and Means Committee

SB 508 – Somerset County Board of Education - Alterations

Statement of Support by Bill Sponsor Senator Mary Beth Carozza

Thank you Chair Wilkins, Vice Chair Feldmark, and members of the distinguished House Ways and Means Committee for this opportunity to present Senate Bill 508 – Somerset County Board of Education - Alterations and ask for a favorable report. The House crossfile, House Bill 1428, unanimously passed this Committee and the House floor by a 133-2 vote.

This local bill would update Maryland statute regarding several processes of the Somerset County Board of Education, with the most urgent to bring the Board into compliance with the Open Meetings Act and to clarify the County Board may take actions in executive session in accordance with the Open Meetings Act.

Following an audit completed by Inspector General Richard Henry on November 19, 2025, the Somerset County Board of Education was found to be out of compliance with the Maryland Education Article, Subtitle 12, Section §3-1204, which pertains to Somerset County only. The Somerset County Board of Education is committed to adhering to all applicable laws and statutory obligations.

However, Section §3-1204, which states that “All final actions of the county board shall be taken at a public meeting”, which has been in place since 1968, has led to confusion about which actions the Somerset County Board of Education can and cannot take in executive session, unlike the clear and specific language in the Open Meetings Act.

This emergency legislation would provide immediate clarity in statute that the Somerset County Board of Education must comply with the Open Meetings Act only, which would allow the Board to promptly proceed with important functions, such as engaging in collective bargaining with the Maryland Teachers Association, voting on matters subject to attorney-client privilege, and engaging in disclosures on personnel matters and student discipline.

This local bill also would allow the County Commissioners of Somerset County to appoint a qualified individual to fill any vacancy on the board for the remainder of the term and until a successor is elected and qualifies. Fourteen other Maryland counties allow the appointment of a local board of education member by the county commission or county council.

In addition, SB 508 creates the statutory authority to add two student board members, one from each public high school in Somerset County to the Somerset County Board of Education. The original bill was amended at the request of the Somerset County Board of Education and is identical to the House cross file, HB 1524, to give the Board flexibility and discretion in the awarding of scholarships to student board of education members. SB 508 also adjusts the compensation for the Somerset County Board of Education members to be on par with other Maryland counties.

I thank you for your kind attention and consideration, and I respectfully request a favorable and very swift report on SB 508.