

**BILL:** House Bill 461  
**TITLE:** Public Schools - Student Attendance - Excused Absences for Mental Health Needs  
**DATE:** March 30, 2021  
**POSITION:** SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS  
**COMMITTEE:** Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs  
**CONTACT:** John R. Woolums, Esq.

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) supports House Bill 461 with amendments to clarify the proposed mandate that a student meet with school personnel following an excused absence for mental health reasons.

Local boards recognize and respect the role of limited unexcused absences for student health reasons including mental, emotional, and behavioral health issues. However, MABE does not support amending State law to refer to mental health issues alone as such a type of lawful absence to be clear, MABE opposed this legislation as introduced to stipulate that one day per marking period be recognized as a lawful absence for mental health reasons.

In the context of state law and regulations, MABE firmly believes that school systems should be accorded the discretion to develop and implement local student attendance policies and programs to promote regular school attendance and reduce truancy. From the federal Every Student Succeeds Act to the Blueprint for Maryland's Future Act, policy-makers and educators agree that student attendance is paramount to their individual educational progress and success.

State regulations, under COMAR 13A.08.01.03 already thoroughly describe the conditions under which a student is lawfully absent from school, and reasonably provide that proof in the form of a written note from the doctor's office is not required unless the absences are continuous. In the alternative to legislation, MABE continues to prefer the revision of the regulations to more clearly include references not only to physical illness but also mental, emotional, and behavioral health issues.

For these reasons, MABE requests a favorable report on House Bill 461 with an amendment to replace SHALL with MAY in line 18 on page 2 of the bill.