



SB941 PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION - VIRTUAL SCHOOLS - ALTERATIONS

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EDUCATION, HEALTH, AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

OPPOSE

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Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS) opposes **SB941 Primary and Secondary Education - Virtual Schools - Alterations**. This bill authorizes the Maryland State Department of Education, a county board of education, or a public institution of higher education to establish a statewide public virtual school in the State. It repeals certain provisions of law regarding the establishment and operation of virtual schools and authorizes eligible students to enroll in any State virtual school. The bill also limits the enrollment of a virtual school and prohibits fees or tuition being charged. It requires the State to distribute federal and State funds to virtual schools.

AACPS appreciates the bill's intent to expand virtual learning opportunities for Maryland students. However, we oppose doing so by imposing a statewide mandate that each local board establish a virtual school. This bill would require each school system to establish a virtual school platform for students in every grade and to do so in the 2021-2022 school year.

Local school systems are already fully authorized to provide appropriate virtual learning opportunities under existing law. In fact, AACPS is currently looking to enter into a virtual school option for current home instruction students as a program of choice in the upcoming school year for targeted middle and high school students who have been successfully enrolled in Home Instruction. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in statewide school facility closures which compelled the immediate transition to distance learning through access to online platforms and other instructional materials from mid-March of 2020 through the current school year. This is also happening without a need for a statewide mandate as such a mandate would result in an unfunded mandate and infringe upon local governance. While virtual options and online learning offerings are planned and will maximize engagement, this does not require a virtual school.

AACPS also has concerns regarding the provision in the bill that would exempt a statewide virtual public school specified State policies and regulations related to the length of time required for learning opportunities per academic year, attendance, curriculum, class size, instruction, staffing ratios, professional development, and textbooks.

Accordingly, AACPS respectfully requests an **UNFAVORABLE** committee report on SB941.