

**Testimony OPPOSITION of House Bill 266
Student Education Equity Grant Program – Established**

**House Ways and Means Committee
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The Maryland State Education Association opposes House Bill 266, which would create a new voucher program in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and send taxpayer dollars to nonpublic schools.

MSEA represents 75,000 educators and school employees who work in Maryland's public schools, teaching and preparing our 896,837 students for careers and jobs of the future. MSEA also represents 39 local affiliates in every county across the state of Maryland, and our parent affiliate is the 3 million-member National Education Association (NEA).

No one wants to get back to school safely and sustainably more than educators. We, the educators working daily with students and families, are painfully aware of the effects of this year's challenges and trauma upon our students and their families. We are frustrated by the lackadaisical implementation of, and resources for, safety measures in our schools. We are frustrated by the lack of availability of vaccines after being told how important it is for us to get vaccinated. We want to be back in our schools, safely and sustainably, for our students. While we want to work together to get our students and staff back into school buildings, House Bill 266 is not the right short-term solution.

House Bill 266 creates the Student Education Equity Grant Program in Maryland, which seeks to give vouchers to students whose schools are not "fully open." Rather than taking funding directly from local school systems through the foundation program, the state should be sending even more funding to schools to ensure that they are able to open safely. The safety measures we have consistently called for are not some set of arcane and unachievable steps, but the very things that the CDC, Maryland Department of Health, MSDE, and OSHA have called for.

As our public schools face billions of dollars in unmet needs and will need even more to address the learning loss and trauma due to the pandemic, it is unconscionable that more public dollars would be diverted to private schools that— have less rigorous accountability standards —while underperforming in comparison to public schools. As we oppose vouchers, we will also fight to ensure that every school in the state that receives public dollars (public and nonpublic schools alike) cannot impose discriminatory policies on staff, students or families based on race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or disability. House Bill 266 does not include any anti-discrimination protections.

MSEA urges an unfavorable report on House Bill 266.