



**Board of Education of Howard County
Testimony Submitted to the Maryland House of Delegates,
Health and Government Operations Committee
March 14, 2022**

**Board of Education
of Howard County**

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**HB0819: UNFAVORABLE
Public Health - COVID-19 and Other Influenza-Like Illnesses - Antibody Tests**

The Board of Education of Howard County (the Board) opposes **HB0819 Public Health - COVID-19 and Other Influenza-Like Illnesses - Antibody Tests** as a restriction on local authority and an unfunded legislative mandate that does not take into consideration direction and guidance of health experts.

HB0819, and similar bills before this Committee, allows employees to substitute a negative antibody test for a vaccine requirement implemented by a government entity for COVID or other similar illness. In a continuing effort to maintain safe, healthy learning environments that fully provide instruction and supports for all students, while balancing multiple layers of staffing challenges and workloads, the Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) has implemented vaccine and weekly testing requirements for staff during the 2021-2022 school year. While this bill gives flexibility similar to that currently afforded HCPSS employees and contractors, it limits local board decision-making authority which may weaken the Board's bond with the local community and adversely impact the community's participation in the governance and operation of HCPSS.

Moreover, alternatives such as testing on a routine basis can become costly when covered by the employer, or an administrative burden for the employer to track. The Maryland Department of Health currently covers these costs while being offered in HCPSS on a weekly basis, but if passed, this law would continue in perpetuity regardless of such funding. Antibody testing is also not an approved method for protection against COVID-19 per the Centers for Disease Control (CDC).

For these reasons, we urge a UNFAVORABLE report of HB0819 from this Committee.