



Delegate Vanessa E. Atterbeary, Chair
Delegate Alonzo T. Washington, Vice Chair
Ways and Means Committee
Room 131, House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

January 14, 2022

Bill: House Bill 165 – Education – Sexual Abuse and Assault Awareness and Prevention Program – Human and Sex Trafficking

Letter of Information

Dear Chairman Atterbeary, Vice Chairman Washington, and Members of the Committee:

I am writing on behalf of the Maryland School Psychologists' Association (MSPA), a professional organization representing about 500 school psychologists in Maryland. We advocate for the social-emotional, behavioral, and academic wellbeing of students and families across the state.

House Bill 165 requires Maryland schools to incorporate information in the health curriculum regarding the awareness and prevention of human and sex trafficking for all students grades six through eight. While MSPA is committed to reducing human and sex trafficking, we are concerned about the way in which this education will be presented, and how students will be supported after the information is presented. The National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments published a report in January 2021 identifying strategies to reduce trafficking in schools, and they identified a “specialized human trafficking curriculum” as a potential strategy.¹ However, other recommended strategies include measures such as training all staff, providing social-emotional skills education, and a way for students to report information to mental health providers following their education. Additionally, the report recommended strong community partnerships.

Currently, there is a significant shortage of school psychologists and other mental health providers in schools. School-based mental health providers already are working beyond their capacity, significantly below the national standards. There may be an influx of students requiring support during human and sex trafficking education that school-based providers may not have the ability to manage. We would urge the committee to consider ways to improve the implementation of education regarding human and sex trafficking in schools, and how to support school-based professionals and students throughout this process.

MSPA is interested in working with members of the committee to develop ways to reduce human and sex trafficking for school-aged children. We are concerned with the potential implications of HB 165. If we can provide any additional information or be of any assistance, please contact us at legislative@mSPAonline.org or Scott Tiffin at stiffin@policypartners.net or 443-350-1325.

Respectfully submitted,

Katie Phipps, M.Ed., Ed.S., NCSP
Chair, Legislative Committee
Maryland School Psychologists' Association

¹ National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments. (2021). *Human trafficking in America's schools: What schools can do to prevent, respond, and help students to recover from human trafficking*, 2nd edition. <https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/sites/default/files/NCSSLE-2021HumanTraffickingGuide-508.pdf>