

BILL: Senate Bill 799
TITLE: Public Schools - Cyber Safety Guide - Development, Usage, and Reporting
DATE: March 14, 2023
POSITION: SUPPORT
COMMITTEE: Education, Energy, and the Environment
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The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) supports Senate Bill 799 which calls for the development and use of an cyber safety guide as an educational resource for parents, educators, and students to promote the appropriate use of the internet and social media.

This bill addresses a very important issue, and one highlighted by the unprecedented utilization by all students of online learning throughout the school closures necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. MABE supports the joint efforts of the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), Maryland Department of Health (MDH), Maryland Center for School Safety, and Department of Information Technology (DoIT) to develop resources for use in instruction and professional development regarding safe internet, social media, and technology usage.

The cyber safety guide is intended to provide best practices and age-appropriate information on critically important issues arising in the context on internet and social media. MABE agrees that the cyber safety guide envisioned by this legislation would be a valuable resource. Students, parents, and school personnel would benefit from such a guide to promote responsible decision-making when using the internet and social media. Key among these issues are the needs to heighten awareness of the impacts of student online activities on the student's digital footprint. Other issues include the impacts of technology usage on student physical and mental health; impacts arising from online content that constitutes cyberbullying and hate speech.

MABE not only appreciates the value of the State's investment in developing the types of cyber safety resource proposed under Senate Bill 799, but also the discretion provided to local school systems regarding the use of the cyber safety guide in schools and classrooms. As this committee knows, MABE opposes efforts by the General Assembly to legislate curriculum, firmly believing that this role belongs to local boards of education in conjunction with the State Board. In the context of recognizing the essential role of the state legislature in enacting laws which establish the framework for key elements of the State's approach to public education, MABE continues to support local decision-making authority in developing and implementing curriculum and courses of instruction. MABE certainly anticipates that the development and distribution of the cyber safety guide will lead to its broad usage in school systems and households across the State.

For these reasons, MABE requests a favorable report on Senate Bill 799.