

**Testimony in Opposition to House Bill 985  
Primary and Secondary Education - Virtual Schools – Alterations**

**House Ways and Means Committee  
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The Maryland State Education Association opposes House Bill 985, which would authorize the State Department of Education, a county board of education, or a public institution of higher education to establish a statewide virtual school, repeal certain provisions of law regarding the establishment and operation of virtual schools, and require the State to distribute certain funds to virtual schools.

MSEA represents 75,000 educators and school employees who work in Maryland's public schools, teaching and preparing our almost 900,000 students so they can pursue their dreams. 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).

The relevance of virtual learning has become increasingly apparent in the wake of the Covid-19 global pandemic. While there are unique teaching and learning challenges inherent to an online setting, virtual schools are here to stay, and it is essential that they are equipped with policies, programs, and standards comparable to those in traditional brick-and-mortar schools.

This legislation removes far too many guardrails and fails to protect or support school employees or the students they serve. By exempting a statewide virtual school from state requirements related to the length of time required for learning opportunities per academic year, attendance, curriculum, class size, instruction, staffing ratios, professional development, and textbooks, it creates a high risk that students attending virtual school will receive a drastically inconsistent and



inequitable educational experience. Further, a lack of consistent requirements would cause considerable implementation issues due to disparities in content, rigor, scheduling, and staffing.

Ensuring that students and staff who are learning and working in virtual schools have equitable resources and adequate support is essential. MSEA supports the more comprehensive virtual schools guardrails and alterations proposed in Senate Bill 610.

**We urge the committee to issue an Unfavorable Report on House Bill 985.**