

BILL: House Bill 1105
TITLE: Public Schools – Water Safety and Swimming Course – Established
DATE: March 8, 2023
POSITION: OPPOSE
COMMITTEE: Ways and Means
CONTACT: John R. Woolums, Esq.

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) opposes House Bill 1105, which would require school systems to offer a course in swimming and water safety to students in grade 8 through grade 12.

Local boards of education are committed to providing all students with opportunities for rigorous and well-rounded educational experiences, including: academic instruction, extracurricular activities, health services, school meals, and athletics. All school systems also strive to provide high quality school facilities in which these services are provided. In these ways, school systems provide programs designed to promote the physical and mental health and fitness of students and to prepare them to maintain a healthy lifestyle as adults. In this light, MABE appreciates the intent of this bill to expand access for all students to swimming lessons. However, MABE opposes House Bill 1105 and the proposed mandate for establishing and offering an elective course in swimming and water safety in all high schools in the State.

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. Although MABE agrees that swimming lessons and instruction in water safety are valuable life skills, local school systems are in no way prepared to accommodate the mandate proposed in this legislation. Local school systems are aware of a national shortage of swimming pools and qualified lifeguards and swimming instructors. MABE also appreciates the rationale for pursuing more equitable access for all students and families to swimming lessons. However, local school systems lack the staff, resources, and facilities to accommodate the proposal to add swimming as a new course required to be offered in all high schools. Maryland's 24 school systems are confronting billions of dollars in funded and unfunded costs to maintain, renovate, and construct new school buildings and have no control over other publicly and privately owned swimming pools. Again, MABE respectfully requests that needs such as those raised by this legislation not be mandated as school programs or curriculum subjects for the reasons outlined above.

MABE's opposition to this bill does not rest on an evaluation of the merits of teaching any specified subject matter, certainly not swimming and water safety, but rather on the association's opposition to statutorily mandating the teaching of any one concept or content item. MABE maintains a strong preference for the adoption of State standards and the local discretion to achieve those standards through locally adopted curriculum and instructional tools and practices.

For these reasons, MABE requests an unfavorable report on House Bill 1105.