



PSSAM
Public School Superintendents' Association
OF MARYLAND

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BILL: HB 985
TITLE: Primary and Secondary Education - Virtual Schools - Alterations
DATE: March 1, 2023
POSITION: Oppose
COMMITTEE: Ways and Means / Appropriations
CONTACT: Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director, PSSAM

The Public School Superintendents' Association of Maryland (PSSAM), on behalf of all twenty-four public school superintendents, **opposes** House Bill 985.

House Bill 985 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 in the State. The bill would also authorize a student who is eligible for enrollment in a Maryland public school to enroll in any virtual school established throughout the State. Furthermore, this bill would repeal certain provisions of law regarding the establishment and operation of virtual schools, as well as require the State to distribute certain funds to virtual schools.

PSSAM appreciates the bill's intent to expand virtual learning opportunities for Maryland students. PSSAM's primary opposition to this bill is that LEAs are already fully authorized to provide appropriate virtual opportunities under existing law with approval and accountability from MSDE.

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in statewide school facility closures and necessitated the immediate transition to distance learning through access to online platforms and other instructional materials from mid-March through the end of the school year. The demands on local school systems to provide almost exclusively online instruction to Maryland's nearly 1 million students, including the provision of tens of thousands of digital devices, has highlighted the significant and inequitable gaps in student, family, and community access to the broadband services needed to access online instruction. Long before the pandemic, PSSAM advocated for funding and policies at the State and federal levels to enhance the ability of local school systems to utilize and make available educational technology that is essential to our students' college and

career readiness and success. Again, before school closures mandated the shift to digital and distance learning, local boards recognized that virtual and distance learning programs and strategies are effective adjuncts to traditional classroom instruction.

PSSAM does not support passage of House Bill 805 because local school systems are already fully authorized to provide appropriate virtual learning opportunities under existing law. PSSAM continues to support state and local efforts to pursue the effective use of virtual learning initiatives and will continue to support programs to optimize the use of technology in improving student instruction. PSSAM recognizes the value and need to continuously improve student access to high quality virtual learning programs, but opposes the approach taken in House Bill 985.

For these reasons, PSSAM **opposes** House Bill 985 and urges an unfavorable report.