

BILL: House Bill 1390
TITLE: Public Schools – Public School Construction – Funding and Administration
DATE: March 26, 2024
POSITION: SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS
COMMITTEE: Budget and Taxation
CONTACT: John R. Woolums, Esq.

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE), representing all twenty-four local boards of education, supports House Bill 1390, to sustain the School Safety Grant Program, and requests an amendment to also sustain the Aging Schools Grant Program. Both programs are valued by local school systems and have a proven track record of enhancing the safety and quality of learning environments for our students and staff. In addition, while MABE appreciates the formation of a new Workgroup of the Assessment and Funding of School Facilities, we request amendments to include a representative of MABE selected by the association’s Executive Director, and would note the value of having representatives from the Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) and Public School Superintendents Association of Maryland (PSSAM) on the previous iteration of this workgroup.

House Bill 1390 would repeal the sunseting of one of two programs included in a provision of a bill passed several years ago, and MABE firmly believes that neither program should be eliminated at this time, if ever. First, the bill would restore the \$10 million School Safety Grant Program. Sadly, if not alarmingly, the threats to school safety that gave rise to the creation of this program in 2018 remain a constant and high priority issues of great concern to all local boards of education in Maryland. Therefore, MABE fully supports the primary objective of this legislation to ensure that school systems are able to access grant funding for projects to improve the safety of school facilities. These funds have, and should continue to, aid local school systems and local governments in funding facility renovations to make schools and classrooms safer places. In addition, this grant funding supports the installation of security technology such as controlled access doors, security cameras, and weapons detection systems.

Secondly, MABE requests an amendment to prevent the sunseting of the other grant program poised to be eliminated in the same section of law. MABE has been a supporter of the Aging School Program since it was established in 1997 and strongly supports maintaining the \$6 million Aging Schools Program in future State budgets. This program provides state funding to local school systems for improvements and repairs of older public school buildings and has contributed to the completion of many important school facility projects that would not have otherwise qualified for state funding.

The Aging School Program provides much needed targeted resources to local school systems for school repairs that are necessary to maintain older public schools. Eligible expenditures under the program include asbestos and lead paint abatement; fire protection systems and equipment; painting; plumbing; roofing; heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems; and other renovation projects. Again, MABE strongly supports continued funding of this important program in order to address the broad scope of aging school facility needs.

The amendment MABE requests would simply involve moving the closing bracket to the right, to ensure that neither Section 5-317, the School Safety Grant Program, nor Section 5-324, the Aging Schools Program, be allowed to sunset beginning in FY 2026 and thereby eliminate the availability of modest but meaningful state investments to improve the safety of quality of public school facilities.

For these reasons, MABE requests a favorable report on House Bill 1390, with the amendment to simultaneously repeal the sunseting of the Aging Schools Program.