

UNFAVORABLE
Senate Bill 426
Education – Maryland STEM Program - Established

Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
Senate Budget & Taxation committee
February 7, 2024

Samantha Zwerling
Government Relations

The Maryland State Education Association respectfully opposes Senate Bill 426, which creates the Maryland STEM Program in the Maryland State Department of Education. This program intends to help bolster STEM education at private schools by compensating public school educators to teach STEM classes at private schools in their off-hours. The bill goes on to mandate an annual \$1 million appropriation to support the program and directs that these payments should run through the local public school system.

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).

While we appreciate the work of the sponsor to reach out and try to address our concerns, ultimately MSEA believes that public dollars should fund public schools and not off-set costs for private education. The mandated appropriation is inopportune when there are proposed budget cuts to public resources like community colleges.

Additionally, we have implementation concerns. As introduced, the bill does not provide any non-discrimination protections for public school educators who work in these schools, unlike the protections schools agree to for participation in the Broadening Options and Opportunities for Students Today (BOOST) voucher program and the Nonpublic Textbook Program. Further, during the time these public school educators would work at the private schools, the bill maintains that they continue to be employees of the public schools and not the private schools. That creates troubling potential implications to liability, workers' compensation, and performance evaluations for the public school system. Moreover, under the bill, local school systems' payroll departments would be responsible for handling compensation to these educators for work they do at private schools. School system payroll departments are already understaffed and overworked, and this program creates additional, complicated work given that educators would be paid a different rate for this program in comparison to their regular teaching job.

MSEA respectfully urges an Unfavorable Report on Senate Bill 426.