



Renee McGuirk Spence, Executive Director

9 Trotters Ridge Court, Catonsville, MD 21228

410-925-2183

pssamed@gmail.com

www.pssam.org

BILL: House Bill 544
TITLE: Public and Nonpublic Schools – Classwork and Assessment Involving Live and Dead Animals - Student Choice Policy
DATE: February 15, 2018
POSITION: OPPOSE
COMMITTEE: Ways and Means
CONTACT: Renee McGuirk Spence, Executive Director, PSSAM
Email: pssamed@gmail.com; Cell: 410-925-2183

House Bill 544 authorizes a student in a public school or nonpublic school to choose not to participate in or observe, in whole or in part, classwork or an assessment that includes certain actions conducted on a certain animal; authorizing a student to choose not to participate in or observe the classwork or assessment at a certain time; requiring a certain student to complete the required classwork or assessment by a certain alternative educational method that meets certain requirements; etc.

PSSAM understands the intent of this legislation. However, we **oppose** House Bill 544.

PSSAM strongly believe that it is critical that locally-governed education policies and procedures remain under the authority of local boards of education. Each local school board must have the flexibility to develop individual student policies and practices that reflect the specific and diverse needs of their system.

Local superintendents have developed well-defined and effective practices on the use of live and dead animals in instructional settings. For example, Baltimore County provides specific guidance in its “Guidelines for the Use of Animals, Plants, and Other Organisms in the School Setting and in Outdoor Science Programs.” The 19-page report, updated in 2013, covers broad-based areas on the use of live and dead animals, including dissection. It provides specific details for teachers, students, and parents. The guidelines require teachers to respond appropriately to views or beliefs of students who are sensitive to dissection. For example, teachers must be able to provide equivalent and appropriate alternative assignments for a student who is opposed to dissection; not react in a negative way to a student’s personal beliefs or attitudes about dissection; and not lower a student’s grade if that student is opposed to dissection and is willing to do an alternative assignment.

PSSAM believes that legislation related to this subject is not necessary because the issue is effectively being handled by local school system policies. Again, we reiterate that it is critical that locally-governed education policies and procedures remain under the authority of local boards of education.

Therefore, PSSAM respectfully **opposes** House Bill 544 and requests an unfavorable committee report.