



Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director

BILL:	House Bill 566
TITLE:	County Boards of Education – Virtual Schools – Requirement
DATE:	February 5, 2021
POSITION:	Oppose
COMMITTEE:	Ways and Means
CONTACT:	Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director, PSSAM

This bill requires all local boards of education, beginning in the 2021/2022 school year, in coordination with the State Department of Education (MSDE), to establish virtual schools to provide students with an alternative to traditional classroom instruction for all grade levels.

The Public Schools Superintendents' Association of Maryland (PSSAM), representing all twenty-four local school superintendents, **opposes HB 566**.

The Covid-19 pandemic has created many challenges in the delivery of public education. However, it has highlighted the value and potential of virtual learning. There is no doubt that virtual learning will continue as a component of public education, well past the end of this pandemic. As the state's top educators, we embrace this new mode of learning and feel it is a welcome supplement to the high-quality education already provided in Maryland schools. We welcome the opportunity to work collaboratively with MSDE and many other stakeholders, including teachers and students, to build a virtual option for Maryland public schools. We appreciate the sponsor's intent and enthusiasm to rapidly move this concept forward for next year's school year, but we respectfully oppose this mandated implementation date, as well as the requirement that programs are created to serve all grade levels.

In order to preserve the highest quality public education in Maryland, we need to enter the world of virtual learning with a deliberate, methodical, and research-based approach. We need to create virtual school programs that ensure academic success for our students and instills confidence for families knowing that their children will continue to receive the highest quality instruction. We also need to work collaboratively with public school teachers, giving them a meaningful role in the development of virtual schools. Too many states have moved to a system of virtual learning that embraces and encourages private entities to run virtual schools. While there may be a role for some outside collaboration with well-tested companies as we build these models, our public-school teachers will be at the center of any new mode of learning. We also need to ensure that these schools are part of the public school system, not an exodus to private and non-public schools. A more formally developed virtual learning model is imminent, but now is not the time to rush into its implementation.

For the reasons stated above, PSSAM **opposes House Bill 566** and requests an **unfavorable** committee report.

One Voice, One Vision for Maryland's Students

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