

Maryland Education Coalition

The Maryland Education Coalition is dedicated to raising the academic achievement of students in Maryland public schools by promoting adequate funding and systemic accountability for improving results.

Statement to the Ways and Means Committee In Opposition to House Bill 394 Education - Primary and Secondary Schools - Electronic Control Devices

Board of Directors:

David Beard, Co-Chair

Rick Tyler, Co-Chair

Charlie Cooper, Secretary

American Association of University
Women (AAUW)

Advocates for Children and Youth
(ACY)

American Civil Liberties Union of
Maryland (ACLU-MD)

League of Women Voters of Maryland
(LWVM)

Maryland Disability Law Center
(MDLC)

Maryland PTA (MD-PTA)

Laura Carr

Carl Stokes

Sharon Rubinstein

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The Maryland Education Coalition (MEC) fights for adequate, equitable funding and systemic accountability because every child deserves a quality education and because achievement gaps must be closed. We also support increased funding to improve the public school buildings where our children learn, concentrating on areas of greatest need. Every child and school employee deserves a school building that promotes and protects academic achievement and occupant health in a safe and orderly environment, but unacceptable disparities persist.

House Bill 394 allows school principals to designate a “safety officer” who may use an electronic control device (popularly known as a taser) to “maintain the security and safety of a school.” The designee could be anyone (see page 2, lines 7-8). There are extensive training requirements, but no required background check or other selection screening policy. There are also requirements for detailed reporting of any use of the device.

In light of several highly publicized school shootings recently, school safety is on nearly everyone’s mind, and there are many people – citizens and experts alike – who are advocating solutions. We believe that a dispassionate and multi-disciplinary examination of the problem in all its various forms is wise – one truly searching for all the forms of vulnerability rather than just those that make headlines. **We support the approach taken in House Bill 453 to establish a Center for School Safety. That bill is also being heard by this Committee today.**

The timing and language of this bill suggests that the sponsors feel that in the case of an intruder in a school building carrying a weapon, the use of a device such as a taser that is intended to be non-lethal could provide a tool to control a threatening person while minimizing the risk of harm to others. We would welcome such an approach except that we are very concerned about the unintended consequences of bringing such a weapon into schools. Our concern include the possible use of the device on unruly students who do not really pose a serious risk of danger to others and on the possibility that the appointed safety officer could be a source of escalating rather than suppressing conflicts.

Without the kind of research-based approach embodied in HB 453, and without sober consideration by a wide range of experts in various fields related to school safety, MEC opposes any attempt to expand the number or type of weapons in schools. Therefore, we ask that you give HB 394 an unfavorable report.