



MONTGOMERY COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION

850 Hungerford Drive ♦ Room 123 ♦ Rockville, Maryland 20850



Bill: House Bill 41
Title: Boards of Education - Anonymous Two-Way Text Messaging Tip Programs
Committee: Ways and Means
Date: January 28, 2016
Position: **OPPOSE**
Contact: Michael Durso, President, Montgomery County Board of Education

The Montgomery County Board of Education opposes House Bill 41.

This bill would necessitate the creation of a two-way anonymous text messaging tip line which could encourage the filing of numerous false reports, each of which would have to be investigated fully.

Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) already has an effective, well-publicized means of reporting bullying, harassment, and intimidation incidents that fully complies with current COMAR regulations. MCPS, in accordance with the *Safe Schools Reporting Act of 2005*, uses MCPS Form 230-35: *Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation Reporting Form*. These forms are described to families and students each year and are readily available in each school and online. In addition, schools provide an anonymous drop box where students leave notes that describe issues of concern, including bullying. A counselor or school administrator follows up on these notes. The creation of an anonymous tip line is an unnecessary addition to existing MCPS protocols, and there is precedence to indicate that it could be misused through the filing of false reports. An anonymous tip line also could flood the MCPS system with false reports, each of which would need to be investigated within 48 hours. The anonymous line also would not allow for timely and systematic investigation of incidents because not all of the information (e.g., the names of the alleged bully(s) and potential witnesses) would be readily available to the school administrator or designee.

Finally, the actual creation of the two-way anonymous text messaging system likely would have little cost associated with it. However, there is the potential for significant costs to be incurred by MCPS to complete the required investigation of numerous reports, many of which may prove to be false due to the anonymity of the reporter. Funds would be required to set up the messaging system and to provide staffing to monitor the system.

For these reasons, we oppose this bill and ask for an unfavorable report.