The Anne Arundel County Board of Education OPPOSES House Bill 866 Primary and Secondary Education - Health and Safety Guidelines and Procedures - Digital Devices. This bill requires the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH), in consultation with the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), to develop health and safety guidelines for the use of digital devices in public school classrooms. Beginning in the 2018-2019 school year, each local board of education must implement the health and safety guidelines and procedures for the use of digital devices in public school classrooms specified in the bill.

This legislation attempts to address student safety concerns, but creates an unfunded mandate for county boards of education. Safety in public schools remains increasingly important to local boards of education as school-related security incidents and threats throughout Maryland and the nation have unfortunately highlighted. The pursuit of a safe school environment must be tempered by a balanced emphasis on the protection of individual student rights. However, House Bill 866 interferes with authority of county boards of education. Effective reform takes place best through cooperative planning within the local community rather than through top-down decisions. As decisions are made on the local level, local boards of education receive and rely on public input. The connection between neighborhoods and local public schools encourages participation by parents and guardians and other community members in the educational process so that everyone has a responsibility for and ownership of public education.

By retaining decision-making authority at the local level, local boards of education can best balance educational practices, available resources to implement those practices, public input, and accountability.

Accordingly, the Anne Arundel County Board of Education respectfully urges an UNFAVORABLE committee report on House Bill 866.