The Anne Arundel County Board of Education OPPOSES House Bill 611. This bill would authorize a county board of education to authorize school employees in the local school system to carry a handgun on school property. The bill would create an exception to the prohibition against carrying a deadly weapon on public school property for a person who has been authorized to carry a handgun by a county board and who has been issued a handgun permit by the Department of State Police (DSP) if the weapon is secured on the person’s body. The bill would also require the Secretary of State Police to issue a handgun permit to a person who is otherwise qualified and who is a school employee in a school system in which the county board has authorized school employees to carry a handgun. This bill would not require this individual to provide a good and substantial reason to wear, carry, or transport a handgun.

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, emphasized. As such, it is imperative that educational leaders are included in the continuing development of security plans.

The State of Maryland and the local boards of education have taken many steps over the years to ensure student safety in schools. In response to the tragic events of September 11, 2001, federal, state and local education officials joined with public safety and emergency management officials to review existing school safety policies and improve coordination through comprehensive emergency plans. Following the tragic school shooting in Newtown, Connecticut in 2012, the legislature called for a review of all emergency plans and the State Board adopted new regulations to specify the types of emergency drills that all schools must conduct each year. In 2013, the State budget included $25 million to support projects such as facility risk assessments, security cameras, photo identification systems for visitor sign-in, lockset changes for interior and exterior doors, hardening glass areas, relocating school office areas to a school’s primary entrance area, and moving relocatable classrooms to improve supervision. In 2015, legislation passed to require that local school systems require contractors and subcontractors to conduct background checks to ensure that no employee is assigned to work on school premises with direct, unsupervised, and uncontrolled access to children if the employee has been convicted of specified crimes. In addition, legislation passed to exempt qualified retired law enforcement officers from the prohibition against carrying or possessing a deadly weapon on public school property.
The Anne Arundel County Board of Education supports legislation and program initiatives that contribute to the safety and well-being of students in school and in the community. However, the Board opposes legislation proposed as “quick fixes” or “Band Aid” solutions such as House Bill 611, which would authorize school personnel to carry handguns on school property. The Board has several concerns with this bill, including the provision which would not require a school employee to provide a good and substantial reason to wear, carry, or transport a handgun.

Accordingly, the Anne Arundel County Board of Education respectfully requests an UNFAVORABLE committee report on House Bill 611.