

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly

FISCAL NOTE

House Bill 1164 (Delegate Montague)

Ways and Means

Education - Children in State-Supervised Care

This bill enables a child in State-supervised care to attend any public school in the county in which the child currently resides; or the school in which the child was attending prior to becoming placed in an out-of-home placement (school of origin); or the school in which the child was last enrolled (school of origin). Local school systems must provide transportation services for students attending their school of origin. The bill prohibits a local school system from denying enrollment to children in State-supervised care solely because the child cannot produce required records.

In addition, within five days after a child in State-supervised care enrolls in a public school, the school must conduct an evaluation of the child's school placement history, academic standing, and circumstances that may affect the child's social adjustment and academic performance. If it is determined that the child needs individual attention, the school must provide the student with specialized services; if it is determined that the child has behavioral problems, the school must develop a behavioral plan for the child. Finally, each public school must prepare a school passport and related instructions for each State-supervised child enrolled in the school.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: None.

Local Effect: Significant increase in local school expenditures. Revenues would not be affected. **This bill imposes a mandate on a unit of local government.**

Small Business Effect: Meaningful.

Fiscal Analysis

Background: In fiscal 1995 there were 927 students placed in out-of-county living arrangements by State agencies. In these situations, the school system where the student's parent or legal guardian resides (sending county) must make a payment to the school system where the child is attending (receiving county). Under current law, this payment is the lesser of the local current expense per student in the sending county or the receiving county. If the local current expense per student in the sending county is less than the receiving county, the State is required to pay the receiving county the difference. For example, local appropriations per pupil totaled \$1,869 in Baltimore City and \$4,069 in Baltimore County in fiscal 1995. When a student from Baltimore City is placed in an educational setting in Baltimore County, Baltimore City has to pay \$1,869 and the State has to pay the remaining \$2,200.

This fiscal note assumes that the current funding arrangement for students placed in an out-of-county living arrangement does not change.

Local Effect: There are approximately 12,000 children in State-supervised care who have been placed in an out-of-home placement and who are eligible to attend a Maryland public school. Pursuant to the bill's provisions, local education expenditures for transportation and evaluation programs could increase by a significant amount as discussed below.

Transportation Services

Student transportation expenditures in fiscal 1996 totaled \$275.5 million or \$478 per student served. Since a child in State-supervised care could attend a school outside the regular school attendance zone for that neighborhood or even a school in another district, transportation costs would increase significantly. This would be consistent with student transportation costs for disabled students. Based on student transportation statistics, transporting disabled students is at least 10 times more expensive than transporting regular students. These higher costs are partly due to fewer students being transported per vehicle, which would be a similar occurrence for students attending schools outside their regular attendance area. Accordingly, student transportation costs could increase by at least \$3,600 per student transported outside of the regular school attendance area. This estimate is based on the combined average per student transportation costs for special programs in Allegany, Anne Arundel, Charles, Prince George's, and Wicomico counties.

The actual impact on local transportation expenditures would depend upon the number of students requesting transportation services outside of the student's regular attendance area and the distance to the school of origin. For illustrative purposes, assuming 25% of students attending a school outside of the students' regular attendance area requested transportation services, local expenditures could increase by at least \$10.8 million annually.

Evaluation and Behavioral Plan

Each local school system provides support programs to help resolve student problems; however, the extent of these programs and services provided to students varies across the State. The Howard County Public School System provides half-time counselors in most elementary schools, two full-time counselors in middle schools, and four counselors and two guidance support staff in each high school. In addition, the school system has 16 psychologists and eight pupil personnel workers to assist troubled or at-risk students. In sum, Howard County spends approximately \$7.3 million on guidance, psychological, and pupil personnel services.

In Prince George's County, 244 guidance counselors work in the county's 170 elementary, middle, and senior high schools. The guidance program provides student intervention services and assistance to students identified as having academic difficulties. The county also has 49 psychologists who provide various student and staff support services. Based on information from Prince George's County, this service helps to promote student achievement and reduce discipline referrals, suspensions, and expulsions. In sum, Prince George's County spends approximately \$18.9 million on guidance and psychological services.

Even with these extensive student support programs, local school systems may have to expand these programs in order to serve each student in State-supervised care. During the 1996-1997 school year, local school systems employed around 688 guidance counselors and 327 pupil personnel/social workers. The average salary for a guidance counselor totals \$47,181 and the average salary for a pupil personnel/school social worker totals \$50,874.

Small Business Effect: Private contractors provide student transportation services in all 24 school districts in the State. In 19 counties, private contractors operate a majority of school vehicles. In fiscal 1996, there were approximately 3,000 private school vehicles under contract statewide. A large segment of these private school vehicles are either owned and operated by individuals or by small transportation companies. Depending upon whether additional school vehicles would be needed to comply with the bill's transportation requirements, these small businesses could be positively impacted.

Information Source(s): Maryland Association of Boards of Education, Maryland State Department of Education, Department of Legislative Services

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