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BILL: House Bill 996
TITLE: Education – Public School Holidays – Easter Monday
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POSITION: Support
COMMITTEE: Ways and Means
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House Bill 996 repeals the requirement that the Monday after Easter be a public school holiday; and authorizes a county board of education to designate the Monday after Easter as a public school holiday.

PSSAM wholeheartedly supports House Bill 996. We applaud the intent of this bill to return the authority to our local county boards to make the determination concerning the Monday after Easter as a school holiday.

PSSAM strongly advocates that school-related calendar decisions should be determined locally and based on meeting the academic needs of our students, providing professional development for our faculties, and honoring the wishes of our communities. Meeting the 180-day school calendar regulation is complex for Maryland's twenty-four school systems. Major snowstorms like we just experienced add additional school calendar problems that need to be resolved.

Further complicating the issue of the school calendar is the increase of diversity among Maryland's students and families. In fact, the Howard County Board of Education recently asked school system staff to identify one additional day to recognize each of the following cultural observances for the 2016-17 school year: Lunar New Year Eve, the Muslim holiday of Eid Al-Adha, and the Hindu holiday of Diwali. The Board asked the school system to propose options for including three new days when schools will be closed next school year.

Repealing the Easter Monday requirement rightly restores this authority to our local boards. It is critical that local school systems maintain local control of school calendars. PSSAM believes that this provides the greatest degree of latitude for local boards of education to manage the unique desires of communities as demonstrated in the Howard County example provided above. It also permits local communities the decision making authority to respond to parent needs.

For the reasons stated above, PSSAM respectfully **SUPPORTS** House Bill 996 and urges a favorable committee report.