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BILL: House Bill 324
TITLE: Education – Maryland High School Diploma – Civics Test Requirement
DATE: February 11, 2016
POSITION: OPPOSE
COMMITTEE: Ways and Means
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House Bill 324 requires a student to take and achieve a passing score on a civics test that consists of the 100 questions used for the civics portion of the Naturalization Test administered by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services; requires on or before the first day of the 2017-2018 school year, the State Board to determine the means of providing each high school student an opportunity to take the required civics test; and requires a student to answer correctly at least 60% of the civics test questions to receive a passing score.

PSSAM understand the intent of House Bill 324. However, PSSAM strongly **opposes** this bill. Local superintendents continue to advocate for local board of education governance of teaching and learning as well as the assessments used to measure student learning. We strongly believe that it is critical that locally-governed education policies and procedures remain under the authority of local boards of education. Each local school board must have the flexibility to develop individual assessment policies and practices that reflect the specific and diverse needs of their system.

PSSAM also has taken the position to oppose all unfunded mandates. House Bill 324 would be costly to administer and place an unnecessary financial burden on local systems to administer yet another test when the existing High School Assessment (HSA) Government exam accurately tests the core concepts of civics and American Government. In fact, there are currently 81 test items that specifically address civics and American Government through a combination of multiple choice and short answer response.

It is important to note that the naturalization exam cited in House Bill 324 is not an adequate assessment of civic learning because it measures only memorized content and not actual understanding. A few examples of the questions include the name of the current Vice President of the United States and the names of national holidays and symbols. The exam is delivered orally; the test is not formatted for either multiple choice or short answer format. The exam requires that examinees answer only 6 of 10 questions correctly. The rigor of the High School Assessment Government exam far exceeds that of the naturalization exam.

Finally, PSSAM again reiterates that we will continue to oppose action that attempts to legislate curriculum, courses of study, or graduation requirements. We firmly believe that this role belongs to local boards of education working together with the State Board of Education.

For the reasons noted above, PSSAM **OPPOSES** House Bill 324 and requests an UNFAVORABLE committee report.