



To: Pennsylvania State Senate
From: Pennsylvania School Boards Association (PSBA)
Re: Opposition to HB 1660

Dear Senator,

On behalf of the more than 5,000 school directors and administrators governing the state's school districts, intermediate units and career and technology centers **PSBA urges your opposition to House Bill 1660 (Sonney) as amended.** The amended bill places overly restrictive and burdensome limitations on locally elected school boards who have been entrusted by their parents and local communities to make decisions regarding all school district operations, including the health and safety of students and staff and alternative educational arrangements in the event of an emergency.

PSBA and its members fully support and welcome public transparency and input from parents, students, staff, and their communities during the process of deciding if an emergency exists, what temporary provisions the school district will enact in response to the emergency, and whether the conditions constituting the emergency still exist. That being said, PSBA opposes the amended bill for a number of reasons.

As amended, the bill seeks to separate emergencies into an "infectious disease" emergency category and a category for all other emergencies, and imposes different requirements based on these categories of emergency. Our members are opposed to this unnecessary separation and believe that districts should be able to follow a uniform process regardless of the type of emergency. Imposing different and stricter requirements based on the category of emergency would erode local control in the event of an emergency related to infectious diseases while our public schools are still in the midst of an ongoing pandemic. This provision also sets a concerning future precedent for further dividing categories of emergencies and prescribing the specific actions locally elected leaders must take, and imposing limitations on them, depending on the type of emergency.

The amended bill additionally changes the process for infectious disease emergencies by reducing the number of days for which temporary emergency provisions may be made from the 60 days originally provided in the bill to just 21 days, and it also requires a local or state disaster emergency declaration be made before a school district emergency could be extended. Requiring the school board to meet within every 21 days would place an unnecessary burden on school board members who serve as uncompensated volunteers elected by their local communities to make these decisions. With most school boards meeting just once per month, this change would also require school boards to go through the time and expense of advertising and holding special meetings for hearings and votes regardless of whether circumstances creating the emergency have changed. Further, requiring a state or local

emergency declaration to be issued in order to extend a school district emergency also takes the ability to respond to an emergency out of the hands of the locally elected school board and does not contemplate emergencies that would not necessitate a broader local or statewide emergency declaration, such as an emergency that only impacts a single school building. School districts need to be able to react quickly and decisively to continue meeting the educational needs of their students without waiting for an action from another entity which may never occur.

For all these reasons, PSBA believes that House Bill 1660 as amended would seriously hamper attempts by locally elected school boards to respond to emergency situations in their school districts and asks legislators to oppose the bill.