

Testimony before the House Ways and Means Committee
House Bill 1231: Public Schools - Student Health Professional Retention Program – Established

****Support****
March 7, 2022

Chair Atterbeary, and Members of the House Ways and Means Committee:

We applaud the Maryland General Assembly for their visionary support for public schools and their goal to create a world-class education system for Maryland students. Critical to the success of this effort is the creation of a high-quality and diverse educational workforce. The Blueprint for Maryland's Future laid out a transformational plan for our teachers and administrators to ensure that our students have the best of the best. Now it is time, through House Bill 1231, to be sure that the support staff that assists the students to be available for learning can be hired and retained by local school systems to do this important work. School social workers are an integral part of the specialized instructional support personnel who help to sustain student learning.

NASW is the largest national organization of the profession, representing over 120,000 social workers nationwide, with 16,000 licensed here in the state of Maryland. Over 500 social workers are currently employed in public schools in our state, assisting students and families so that children can learn, grow, and thrive.

The covid pandemic has had a devastating effect on student mental health, with more of our children and youth experiencing the anxiety that results from an unpredictable environment, and more sadly for others, the depression that comes from loss. Some students shore up with enhanced support and short-term psychoeducation and can then meet with classroom success, but others have diagnosable mental health conditions that require more intensive treatment. School social workers are the only MSDE-certificated educational professionals who are also fully licensed mental health providers.

On Monday February 21, WJLA television reported on their 6:00 p.m. news that the Montgomery County Public Schools had 50 vacancies for school social workers for the 2021-2022 school year but were only able to hire two. Other Maryland school districts report similar difficulties. There is no time to waste. We urge you to give House Bill 1231 a favorable report.

Respectfully,

Mary Beth DeMartino, LCSW-C
Executive Director, NASW-MD