



**Board of Education of Howard County
Testimony Submitted to the Maryland Senate,
Finance Committee
February 7, 2023**

**Board of Education
of Howard County**

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**SB0201: FAVORABLE W/AMENDMENTS
Maryland Medical Assistance and Children's Health Insurance Programs -
School-Based Behavioral Health Services – Reimbursement**

The Board of Education of Howard County (the Board) supports **SB0201 Maryland Medical Assistance and Children's Health Insurance Programs - School-Based Behavioral Health Services – Reimbursement** with amendments that would expand access to reimbursements and clarify certification of school-based positions.

SB0201 requires the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) to apply to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services by December 2023 to amend Maryland's state plan to allow behavioral health services provided in school settings to be reimbursable. If approved, reimbursements could be sought for medically necessary behavioral health services provided in a school setting to those students enrolled in the Maryland Medical Assistance Program or the Maryland Children's Health Insurance Program regardless of whether services are provided under an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP). Services must be provided by a mental health provider working within the scope of their practice. The bill also requires MDH to provide training to school systems on enrollment, billing, documentation, and compliance.

The Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) utilizes School-Based Mental Health Services (SBMHS) to enhance student well-being and remove barriers to mental health treatment by providing therapy services in schools during school hours. Services are provided through a partnership between the HCPSS, Howard County Health Department, The Horizon Foundation, The Kahlert Foundation, and approved community mental health agencies. SBMHS are voluntary and parent/guardian consent is required for all services.

In HCPSS, SBMHS provided by approved community mental health agencies are billed through an individual's insurance. However, resources are available to support all students regardless of insurance. This is part of a collaborative effort to support student's social and emotional well-being and academic achievement that includes services by school social workers, licensed mental health professionals from community mental health agencies, student services staff, teachers, and school administration.

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SB0201 would benefit school systems financially through the increased access to reimbursement when services are provided to students covered by the programs. Currently, when school system counselors, social workers, pupil personnel workers, and psychologists provide services during the school day they can only be billed under Medicare/Medicaid if related to services for a disability. The parameters of the resulting amendment approval once requested by MDH would determine what services could be reimbursed and the ultimate financial impact for the school system.

The Board recommends the following two amendments to SB0201 to maximize possible reimbursements:

- In lines 15 to 16 on page 2, “PUPIL PERSONNEL WORKERS” should be added to the list of mental health providers certified by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) as their services often involve student counseling and group therapy similar to the other positions.
- In lines 19 to 20 on page 2, “CERTIFIED BY THE MARYLAND STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION” should be removed as nurses working for the school system are not certified by MSDE.

With the above changes, we urge a FAVORABLE report of SB0201 from this Committee.