



HOWARD COUNTY OFFICE OF COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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Delegate Vanessa Atterbeary, Chair
House Ways & Means Committee
House Office Building, Room 131
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: **TESTIMONY OF SUPPORT**: HB 488: Janet L. Hoffman Loan Assistance Repayment Program – Mental Health Professionals in Public Schools

Dear Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and Members of the Committee,

I commend Delegate Vogel for introducing House Bill 488 which would expand the Janet L. Hoffman Loan Assistance Repayment Program to include mental health professionals serving as school psychologists, resource psychologists, psychologist coordinators, social workers, social worker supervisors, or mental health coordinators in our public schools.

As County Executive and a former educator, I understand the power of education provides critical pathways to advancement. However, none of that would be possible without the hard work and dedication of educators who work to ensure bright futures for the next generation. Expanding the loan repayment program to mental health professionals serving our schools will help retain and attract our most talented experts while also acknowledging the critical role they play in students' overall well-being.

We remain committed to strengthening community-based mental health resources and long-term investments in supporting the needs of our educators and schools throughout Howard County. In 2021, I announced nearly \$2 million in funding for enhanced mental health services to ensure that all 78 of our schools would have the funding for direct access to a social worker.

Last October, I announced \$1.5 million in funding for a student loan assistance program for those who commit to teaching in the Howard County Public School System to help attract and retain the highest quality teachers. This comes on top of our commitment of \$16 million in retention bonuses received by educators in the past year and \$1 billion investment in the school systems FY23 budget.

Now more than ever, it is critical to ensure the academic success and access to mental health care services for our students. In order to do this, we must commit to supporting the professionals who serve them and our communities.

I welcome your support and urge a favorable report on HB 488.

All the Best,

Calvin Ball
Howard County Executive