



MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND

DAWN LUEDTKE
COUNCILMEMBER
DISTRICT 7

February 13, 2023

The Honorable Delegate Vanessa Atterbeary
Taylor House Office Building, Room 131
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

SUBJECT: Support HB 488

Dear Chairwoman Atterbeary and Members of the Ways and Means Committee,

I am writing to urge you to support House Bill 488 regarding loan repayment assistance for mental health professionals working in Maryland's public schools. This would incentivize individuals who are interested in mental and behavioral health work to serve our K-12 population without fear of mounting student loan debt.

A survey by the CDC revealed four in 10 teenagers reported feeling "persistently sad or hopeless," with one in five contemplating suicide. Our local students are no exception. In the first two months of 2022, [nine Montgomery County Public Schools \(MCPS\) students committed suicide](#), yet we started this school year with [30 vacant school psychologist positions](#). With this limited capacity, mental health professionals in our public schools are forced to focus on the most pressing needs, limiting them to crisis intervention and legally required services like special education assessments. This means that students with anxiety disorders, PTSD, depression, and other mental health challenges are not having their needs addressed until they are on the brink of a crisis, with help coming too late for far too many.

The student loan crisis has only exacerbated this shortage of mental health professionals available to work within the local school systems. With increasing education costs, especially for the advanced training and licensure required for psychologists and social workers, many people cannot afford to go into this field. Once the educational and licensure requirements are completed, the pressure to pay off student loans means qualified professionals must choose between seeking employment where they can make the most money over those where they will have the greatest impact. By offering students loan assistance for mental health professionals in public schools, we can incentivize highly qualified mental health professionals to seek employment serving students and families in our public schools.

HB 488 is an investment in the health and well-being of our students and our public school professionals. It will allow for mental health prevention and intervention work, increase student well-being, and improve overall school community climate. .

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dawn Luedtke". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "D" and "L".

Dawn Luedtke
Councilmember, District 7
Montgomery County