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February 15, 2023

COMMITTEE: House Ways and Means Committee

BILL: HB 488 – Janet L. Hoffman Loan Assistance Repayment Program – Mental Health Professionals in Public Schools

POSITION: Support

The Horizon Foundation is Howard County's community health foundation and the largest independent health philanthropy in the state of Maryland. We lead community change so everyone in Howard County can live a longer, better life.

The Foundation is pleased to support HB 488 – Janet L. Hoffman Loan Assistance Repayment Program – Mental Health Professionals in Public Schools.

The Janet L. Hoffman Loan Assistance Repayment Program (LARP) helps Marylanders who work in public service jobs repay their student loans. These positions include lawyers, nurses, social workers, teachers and more. HB 488 would expand that list to include mental health professionals in schools, such as school psychologists, school social workers, and mental health coordinators.

Over the past decade, Howard County has identified mental and behavioral health services as a critical need in schools. That need has grown significantly both in Howard County and across the state, particularly since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2018, the Horizon Foundation launched a pilot program with the Howard County Public School System to bring enhanced mental health supports, including 1:1 counseling, to students during the school day. This program is currently expanding to every public school in the County. HB 488 will help Howard County recruit and retain mental health professionals to provide these services, helping to implement this program effectively. With recent data showing that anxiety, depression, and other mental health indicators are on the rise, expanding loan repayment assistance to mental health professionals in schools will help attract providers to meet this growing need and ensure that every student in Howard County can get the mental health support they need and deserve.

Horizon Foundation Testimony
HB 488 – Janet L. Hoffman Loan Assistance Repayment
Program – Mental Health Professionals in Public Schools
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Mental health is a top priority for the Horizon Foundation. In addition to our work with the Howard County Public School System, we have raised awareness through our Mental Health Film Festival and reached thousands of community members with our Emotional Support Human campaign. We have also worked to increase access to mental health crisis services through our work with the Greater Baltimore Regional Integrated Crisis Systems (GRBICS) Partnership, as well as helped support the operation of Sheppard Pratt's new urgent care behavioral health clinic in ElkrIDGE.

HB 488 is another tool to help ensure we have the mental health professionals we need to serve our communities. For this reason, the Horizon Foundation **SUPPORTS HB 488** and urges a **FAVORABLE** report.

Thank you for your consideration.