



MARYLAND
Association of
COUNTIES

House Bill 488

Janet L. Hoffman Loan Assistance Repayment Program - Mental Health Professionals in Public Schools

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Ways and Means and Appropriations
Committees

Date: February 15, 2023

From: Brianna January

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** HB 488. This bill would extend eligibility to Maryland's existing student loan repayment assistance program to mental and behavioral school staff who serve at least one year in a public school.

Maryland's public school educators, State and local government staff, and even nonprofit professionals already enjoy the aid of the Student Loan Repayment Program and its accompanying tax credit. HB 488 recognizes the hiring and retention challenges facing other public school professionals, and extends this existing program to school staff supporting our students' behavioral and mental health needs.

This is an especially important undertaking at a time when our students are struggling with mental health as they return to classrooms post-pandemic and as our schools struggle to hire and retain qualified staff. By allowing these critical school staff to apply for the State's student loan repayment assistance program, these professionals are more likely to serve in a Maryland public school and to remain serving in them. Additionally, doing so offers an added incentive for more people to pursue education in these understaffed fields.

Counties remain committed to supporting all students and the school professionals working with them. HB 488 would help ensure our public schools are better staffed with qualified behavioral and mental health staff and that the state's most vulnerable low-income students have better access to their services. Counties view this bill as a valuable tool to help address this vexing issue, and accordingly, MACo requests a **FAVORABLE** report on HB 488.