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Local Revenues



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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
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Testimony in Support of House Bill 545: Janet L. Hoffman Loan Assistance Repayment Program - Nancy Grasmick Public School Professional Award - Public School Nurses
February 13, 2024

Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Chang, and esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee, it is my pleasure to come before you and offer testimony in favor of **House Bill 545: Janet L. Hoffman Loan Assistance Repayment Program - Nancy Grasmick Public School Professional Award - Public School Nurses**. This bill addresses an oversight in the Janet Hoffman Loan Assistance Repayment Program. This program was established by the Maryland General Assembly to address professional shortages in state and local governments, as well as the non-profit section.

According to the Maryland Higher Education Commission's website, nurses are eligible for this program – except school nurses. This exclusion seems to be an oversight, but one that is detrimental to our students. School nurses are responsible for the health of each and every student, yet we do not even have enough nurses to have one nurse in every school.

There is on average about 0.75 nurses per school on a statewide basis, according to the most recently available data from the Maryland State Department of Education (2018-2019). This number translates to an average of 1 nurse per 848 students. In Frederick, Montgomery, and Washington Counties, as well as Baltimore City, the numbers are dramatically worse with one nurse per close to 1,500 students.

We need to correct the oversight in the Janet Hoffman Loan Assistance Repayment Program for school nurses. The program already recognizes other health professions that work in schools including speech language pathologists and occupational therapists. Last year, the Maryland General Assembly clarified that the program must also be available to mental health professionals in school. School nurses are the only health professionals excluded from the program.

The school nursing shortage will not be addressed overnight, and it will take more than this legislation. However, we know that loan repayment programs provide a strategy that works. It simply does not make sense that school nurses are the only school health professionals excluded from the Janet Hoffman Loan Repayment Program, nor that nurses in other governmental settings are eligible, just not school nurses.

Finally, we all know that we are in the midst of an extended crisis with the nursing shortage. Our school systems are struggling more than ever to compete with the private sector for nurses. Maryland's Commission to Study the Health Care Workforce Crisis recognized the need to focus workforce shortage strategies on all settings, including school health. To combat this growing crisis, I urge a favorable report on **House Bill 545**.

Bernice Mireku-North