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Budget and Taxation Committee

Subcommittees

Capital Budget

Pensions

Chair, Public Safety,
Transportation, and Environment

Joint Committee on the Chesapeake and
Atlantic Coastal Bays Critical Area

Chair, Joint Subcommittee on
Program Open Space/Agricultural
Land Preservation

THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

February 28, 2024

Testimony in Favor of SB 545
Primary and Secondary Education - Public School Employees - Salaries

Chairman Feldman, Vice-Chair Kagan, and members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee:

I respectfully request a favorable report of Senate Bill 545 to implement targeted reforms and funding solutions to address the educator shortage impacting every jurisdiction across the State.

As this Committee well knows, Maryland is experiencing a significant educator shortage. This is not for lack of qualified and passionate educators and service providers - these professionals can simply be paid more for their expertise in other fields. As a result of the consequent vacancies, additional strain is placed on the shoulders of educators who are already past their limit as they take on the countless roles already expected of them. Service provider roles are sometimes contracted out, which results in high-turnover and disrupted continuity of services in communities that need stable support the most. Many of these contracted positions are currently paid for by Federal American Rescue Plan funding, which reaches its sunset this year and will result in the sudden loss of critical specialist positions. The chaos that results from the vacancies, high turnover, and reliance on one-time Federal funding is unsustainable and a disservice to students, educators, families, and school communities. With the passage of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future in 2021, the General Assembly made a commitment to providing the school communities of Maryland the absolute best education system available. Senate Bill 545 is a critical step toward fulfilling that promise.

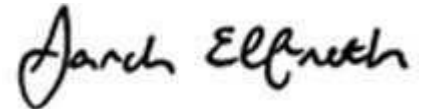
SB 545 will expand eligibility for salary increases that are currently limited to Nationally Board Certified (NBC) teachers to additional highly qualified educators. There are many teachers - who are not directly the teacher of record - who have National Board Certifications but are currently not eligible for the state portion of the salary increases (\$10,000 for NBC and \$7,000 more for teaching in an identified low-performing school). SB 545 would expand eligibility for these increases to those teaching in critical shortage areas like reading and math specialists, department heads, school counselors, literacy interventionists, gifted and talented specialists, and more who are just as important to the daily instruction and success for students as the classroom teacher/teacher of record. Leveling the playing field is important to ensuring that highly qualified educators in these roles remain in our public schools. They have earned the national certifications, they work directly with students daily, and they should not be left out of the salary enhancement.

SB 545 will expand eligibility for these salary increases to behavioral health and other school-based student service providers who obtain highly regarded national accreditation in their profession. School psychologists, speech pathologists, social workers, and others who work directly with students are not eligible for National Board Certification but have the ability to gain national certification from equally prestigious accreditation bodies. Under the Bill, the Maryland State Board of Education and the Professional Standards and Teacher Education Board would vet and determine what the appropriate and applicable accreditations are in each job type. Educators in these fields often face staggering caseloads and shrinking pipelines to fill these critical positions, underscoring the importance of our efforts to recruit and retain them through simple changes like this Bill proposes. This would also incentivize our most experienced professionals to stay and serve students and mentor colleagues who are earlier in their careers. Again, they have earned the top accreditation but are not eligible for bonuses under Blueprint.

In order to recruit and retain the absolute best educators and school-based service providers in Maryland, we must ensure that salaries and incentives align with the expertise and level of professional achievement for all school specialties. SB 545 puts the promise of the Blueprint into practice to deliver the absolute best and brightest educators to Maryland school communities.

I urge a favorable report on SB 545.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sarah Elfleth". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Senator Sarah Elfleth
District 30