



Senator Brian J. Feldman, Chair
Senator Cheryl C. Kagan, Vice Chair
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

February 27th, 2024

Bill: Senate Bill 0545 - Primary and Secondary Education - Public School Employees - Salaries

Position: Support

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Committee:

The Maryland School Psychologists' Association (MSPA) - which represents about 500 Maryland school psychologists - strongly supports Senate Bill 0545 Primary and Secondary Education - Public School Employees - Salaries. SB 0545 adds school psychologists and other school based mental health practitioners to the Blueprint's career ladder. Such a change would help attract new entrants to the school psychology profession and therefore help address Maryland's school psychologist shortage. Although the Assembly recently passed laudable legislation to attract new teachers and address students' increasingly severe mental health concerns, the lack of similar legislation ameliorating the school psychologist shortage threatens both those goals. As a result, although MSPA appreciates Maryland's current delicate fiscal situation, it must urge passage of SB 0545.

Unfortunately, Maryland falls behind states like New Hampshire, Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, and Delaware in the number of school psychologists employed per student. In addition, Maryland's current school psychologist per student ratio of 1 school psychologist for every 1066 students falls far short of the National Association of School Psychologists' recommended ratio of 1 school psychologist for every 500 students. For comparison, Massachusetts employs 1 school psychologist for every 686 students, and New York employs 1 school psychologist for every 629 students.¹ Evidently, Maryland's efforts to meet the NASP recommended ratio fall behind those of peer states.

The consequences of Maryland's school psychologist shortage for students, families, and school communities are dire. To prevent and address students' mental health concerns, The National Center for School Mental Health (NCSMH) recommends a continuum of supports originating in schools and continuing into community based institutions.² School psychologists' unique training in both education and mental health assessment and intervention enables them to play a vital role connecting school and community based elements of this continuum. However, the shortage prevents school psychologists from performing school-based prevention and intervention activities envisioned by the NCSMH. As a result, students' mental health challenges remain unaddressed until becoming severe enough to warrant treatment by community based providers or even assessment for a legally defined disabling condition. Much damage and suffering occurs before students' can access those supports.

¹ 2024. National Association of School Psychologists State Shortages Dashboard. Retrieved from:
<https://www.nasponline.org/about-school-psychology/state-shortages-data-dashboard>

² 2024. National Center for School Mental Health. University of Maryland School of Medicine. Retrieved from:
<https://www.schoolmentalhealth.org/resources/foundations-of-school-mental-health/>

The mental health crisis afflicting Maryland’s children, youth, and young adults continues to worsen.³ Moreover, teachers cite inadequate support for addressing those concerns as one of the primary reasons for decisions to leave their profession.⁴ Thus, although the Assembly took commendable steps to attract new teachers and address students’ mental health concerns, the omission of similar efforts for attracting, training, and retaining school based mental health professionals threatens those goals. In all, Maryland’s children, families, and communities will continue to suffer.

MSPA therefore applauds all legislation drafted to address the ongoing shortage. Thank you for considering our comments on SB 0545. If we can provide any additional information or be of any assistance, please do not hesitate to contact us at legislative@mSPAonline.org or Sarah Peters at speters@hbstrategies.us or 410-322-2320.

Respectfully submitted,

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Maryland School Psychologists’ Association.

³ 2024. AAP-AACAP-CHA Declaration of a National Emergency in Child and Adolescent Mental Health. Retrieved from: <https://www.aap.org/en/advocacy/child-and-adolescent-healthy-mental-development/aap-aacap-cha-declaration-of-a-national-emergency-in-child-and-adolescent-mental-health/>

⁴ 2023. Rand Corporation. Teacher Well-Being and Intentions to Leave: Findings from the 2023 State of the American Teacher Survey. Retrieved from: https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA1108-8.html