

**Committee:** Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment

**Bill Number:** Senate Bill 545 Primary and Secondary Education - Public School Employees - Salaries

**Hearing Date:** February 28, 2024

**Position:** Support

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee,

My name is Mrs Sue Young and I serve Belvedere Elementary in Anne Arundel County as their school counselor. I am writing in support of Senate Bill 545, which is needed to clarify and rectify inconsistencies that are currently occurring between various local counties and acknowledgement that salary increases are needed to recruit and retain school counselors.

Last Fall, I received an email from AACPS HR stating that I would no longer qualify after this year for any stipend or salary enhancement, even while I have attained the highest level of certifications available for my area of expertise - school counseling – with 3 different certifications. I currently hold national certifications to support both the preventative/teaching side of my role (NBCT) and the responsive counseling side of my role (NBCC and NCSC). Each of these certifications requires that I renew every 5 years to maintain additional education and learn updated information to maintain the highest level of school counseling services for my students.

There is significant confusion in implementation of the Blueprint legislation, despite the Accountability Implementation Board (AIB) acknowledging that the career ladder includes school counselors. **Senate Bill 545 will offer a clear path for acknowledgement that salary increases are needed to recruit and retain school counselors.**

NBCT school counselors have undergone the same rigorous process as NBCT classroom teachers to attain this highly challenging level of recognition in their field. To attain this, we must be able to recognize student needs, develop specific interventions to address those needs and demonstrate data driven evidence of the direct impact to students based on those interventions.

School counselors are the ONLY mental health professionals who are eligible for NBCT. This is because school counselors are the ONLY mental health providers in our schools that provide mental health services to EVERY student in our buildings. We provide preventative services through classroom lessons and small group counseling. We also provide responsive services through individual and small group counseling. Both types of services are needed to address the mental health needs of our students. Before students can be ready to be successful academically, mental health needs to be addressed first to ensure the overall success of our Maryland students.

In addition, school counselors teach other lessons to all students on their caseloads throughout the year related to coping strategies, communication, managing emotions effectively, navigating peer conflict with active listening to resolve conflict, academic success strategies, as well as goal setting and college and career support. Our curriculum focuses on three domains - personal/social, academic and college/career.

We teach through classroom and small group instruction and this is why we are the ONLY mental health providers in schools that are eligible for NBCT certification.

Currently I am teaching lessons (in 25 different classrooms) to every student in my building as it relates to Erin's Law - a Maryland Law requiring lessons on personal safety to prevent childhood sexual abuse. In the fall, I taught prevention lessons related to the Start Talking MD law teaching lessons on drug abuse prevention/opioid education. This month, I am also working with 5th grade students to prepare and learn about their options as they transition to Middle School. In March, I will start my lessons at every grade level to teach students online safety.

With the passing of Senate Bill 545, this inequity and inconsistency between county jurisdictions that currently exists between NBCTs will be corrected at the state level and will be in alignment with the AIB's acknowledgement that school counselors should be included in the career ladder opportunities afforded to professionals who attain NBCT. **I ask for a favorable Committee report on Senate Bill 545.** Please feel free to contact me with any questions or additional information you need.

Sincerely,

Mrs Priscilla Sue Young, M. Ed., NBCT, NBCC, NCSC

Belvedere Elementary School Counselor / [psyoun@aacps.org](mailto:psyoun@aacps.org)

NBCT: National Board Certified Teacher/ School Counseling : since 2020

NBCC: National Board Certified Counselor : since 1998

NCSC: National Board Certified School Counselor / Speciality Area: since 2016