



House Bill 545

*Janet L. Hoffman Loan Assistance Repayment Program - Nancy Grasmick Public School
Professional Award – Public School Nurses*

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Appropriations Committee

Date: February 13, 2024

From: Brianna January

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** HB 545. This bill would extend eligibility to Maryland’s existing student loan repayment assistance program to school nurses who serve 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. Just last year, the General Assembly extended eligibility to public school behavioral and mental health staff.

HB 545 recognizes the hiring and retention challenges facing other public school professionals and extends this existing program to school staff supporting our students’ health needs and well-being.

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, including school nurses. 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 nursing and the medical field.

Counties remain committed to supporting all students and the school professionals working with them. HB 545 would help ensure our public schools are better staffed with school nurses 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 **SUPPORTS** HB 545 and requests a **FAVORABLE** report.