

**Testimony before the Senate Education, Energy and the Environment Committee
March 27, 2025**

**House Bill 879: Task Force to Improve Attendance and Reduce
Chronic Absenteeism in Schools**

****Support with Amendment****

Senator Feldman, Senator Kagan, and Members of the Senate Education, Energy and the Environment Committee:

On behalf of the National Association of Social Workers, Maryland Chapter (NASW-MD) we would like to express our support for the Task Force to Improve Attendance and Reduce Chronic Absenteeism in Schools, HB 879. We also ask for one small and important amendment.

Chronic absenteeism is not a new issue in schools but has skyrocketed since the pandemic. [MSDE attendance data](#) updated in January 2025 show that it currently stands at 26.7%, 54% higher than when schools closed for the pandemic in March 2020. As Maryland remains committed to a landmark investment in public school instruction for our future citizens, it is critical that this issue be addressed. Those who are not in the classroom are not learning.

Students are motivated to attend school when the attraction to being there outweighs what gets in their way. The older they get, the greater agency they have. A report from [Attendance Works](#) updated in June 2024 puts the factors that impact school attendance into four categories: barriers, aversion, disengagement, and misconceptions. Each category requires a different response. For example, a positive school climate where students feel safe and valued, with engaging instruction that provides a vision of success in adulthood, is a critical factor in addressing disengagement. The Blueprint's Pillars 2, 3, and 4 are all aimed at creating this environment, addressing a key component in student engagement. Sadly, for many students, this is not enough to ensure that they attend.

The State of Maryland will benefit from a more detailed examination of all factors that play a role in chronic absenteeism, as well as identifying the resources currently available to address them and their impact. This information can inform the General Assembly's work going forward and support our historic transformation into world-class schools. School Social Workers, licensed educational professionals through MSDE as well as licensed health care providers under Health Occupations Code, provide specialized school-based services unique from other nursing and public health professionals as well as their school-based colleagues in school

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counseling and pupil personnel services. This is why we are requesting an amendment to ensure the addition of a school social worker to the Task Force:

On page 2, after line 14, insert:

(#) one school social worker;

(#) one school-based licensed clinical social worker, registered nurse, or other school-based public health professional; and

We ask that you return a favorable report with this amendment.

Respectfully,

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