

Testimony before the House Ways and Means Committee

House Bill 689: Maryland Medical Assistance Program – Use of Reimbursement Funds by Schools

****Support with Amendment****

February 25, 2025

Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and Members of the House Ways and Means Committee:

On behalf of the School Social Work Committee of the National Association of Social Workers, Maryland Chapter (NASW-MD) we would like to express our support for the Maryland Medical Assistance Program – Use of Reimbursement Funds by Schools, HB 689.

This legislation builds on the work of the Commission to Study the Health Care Workforce Crisis. Established by SB 440/HB 625 in 2022, the Commission undertook a two year study to frame recommendations for Maryland’s ongoing efforts to address healthcare professional shortages. The shortages identified by their report extend into the schools, including school social workers as well as other health professionals. States have been struggling to identify additional resources to bolster their school health workforce through recruitment and retention.

This bill’s underlying intention is to ensure schools direct resources from Medicaid billing for school health services to address the shortage. We would request three amendments which we believe align with the intent of the bill:

Amendment 1 - Clarifying which practitioners may be reimbursed - On page 1 in lines 21-23:

~~(2) “PROVIDER” MEANS A SCHOOL AUDIOLOGIST, SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST, SCHOOL SPEECH PATHOLOGIST, AND ANY OTHER HEALTH CARE PRACTITIONER WHO PROVIDES SERVICES TO A STUDENT IN A SCHOOL SETTING. PRACTITIONER WHO IS AUTHORIZED TO PRACTICE IN A SCHOOL SETTING UNDER THE HEALTH OCCUPATIONS ARTICLE OR EDUCATION ARTICLE~~
INCLUDING:

- _____ (i) nurses;
- _____ (ii) social workers;
- _____ (iii) professional counselors;
- _____ (iv) marriage and family therapists;
- _____ (v) occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants;
- _____ (vi) speech language pathologists;
- _____ (vii) physical therapists;

(viii) school counselors; and

(ix) school psychologists.

Amendment 2 - Clarifying the reimbursement funds covered by this bill. Schools are eligible to bill for a wide range of Medicaid services beyond those provided by health care providers, especially for students with disabilities. As we understand the bill's intention, it is the funds generated by health care providers that must be directed to supporting the shortages in those professions - On page 2 in lines 1-5:

(3) "REIMBURSEMENT FUNDS" MEANS FUNDS RECEIVED BY AN ELEMENTARY OR SECONDARY SCHOOL, OR A COUNTY SCHOOL SYSTEM, FOR SERVICES RENDERED IN A SCHOOL SETTING BY A PROVIDER AS DEFINED IN (2) ABOVE TO AN INDIVIDUAL ENROLLED IN THE MARYLAND MEDICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM OR THE MARYLAND CHILDREN'S HEALTH INSURANCE PROGRAM.

Amendment 3 - Clarifying how funding may be spent. As we understand the bill's intention, new resources from Medicaid billing for school health must be directed toward the school health workforce. We would recommend a change in language to differentially target recruitment and retention and to encourage top professionals to work with the neediest students. On page 2 in lines 8-15:

(1) ADDITIONAL POSITIONS FOR PROVIDERS;

(2) PAID INTERNSHIPS FOR STUDENTS SEEKING TO BECOME PROVIDERS AND STIPENDS FOR THOSE PROVIDERS DIRECTLY SUPERVISING SUCH INTERNS;

(3) STIPENDS FOR PROVIDERS THAT ARE DESIGNED TO ADDRESS PROBLEMS IN PROVIDER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION; AND

(4) ~~STIPENDS~~ SALARY INITIATIVES FOR PROVIDERS WORKING IN LOW-PERFORMING SCHOOLS THAT ARE DESIGNED TO ADDRESS PROBLEMS IN PROVIDER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION.

HB 689 provides a funding mechanism to bolster the healthcare workforce in schools so that the needs of our most vulnerable and at-risk students can be best addressed. We ask you to consider our proffered amendments and return a favorable report.

Respectfully,

Gail L. Martin, MSW

Legislative Committee Liaison, Social Work in Schools Committee
NASW-MD