

Oral Testimony in Support of HB546

Good afternoon, Chair, Vice Chair, and members of the Committee.

My name is Kahlil Kuykendall. I am an MCPS educator and a professor of Stress Management at George Washington University.

I am here in strong support of HB546. Before I begin, I'm going to take one slow breath – because something that simple is part of why I am still teaching today.

Maryland is facing a teacher retention crisis. Educators are not leaving because they don't care. They are leaving because they are exhausted. Chronic stress, emotional overload, and the cumulative weight of responsibility are pushing talented teachers out of classrooms they once loved. I know this because I lived it.

Early in my career, I experienced burnout. I loved my students. I was committed. But I was emotionally exhausted and physically depleted. I quietly wondered if I could sustain this profession.

What changed my trajectory was learning the science of stress and evidence-based wellbeing training in stress physiology and mindfulness. I learned how chronic stress impacts the brain – and how intentional practices, even something as small as a breath, can regulate the nervous system and restore clarity. Understanding how chronic stress affects the brain and body – and learning how to regulate it – made my work sustainable. That training kept me in the classroom.

Educators are not leaving because they lack passion. They are leaving because they lack sustainable support. Burnout is not a personal weakness – it is a systems problem.

HB546 recognizes educator wellbeing as a professional competency. By offering accredited training that counts toward licensure, this bill positions wellbeing not as optional self-care, but as a retention strategy.

When teachers are regulated, classrooms are stable. When educators are supported, students thrive.

As someone who nearly left – and stayed because I received the right tools – I urge your favorable support of HB546.

Thank you for your time and your commitment to Maryland's educators and students.

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