

**Testimony in Support of House Bill 916  
Higher Education - Programs for Behavioral Health Professionals in  
Primary and Secondary Schools - Requirements and Grant Program**

**Appropriations  
Thursday, March 10<sup>th</sup>, 2022  
1:00 p.m.**

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The Maryland State Education Association supports House Bill 916, which would require public institutions of higher education with behavioral health programs to offer courses in a manner that maximizes the number and types of students who may participate and coordinate with other public institutions of higher education and establish the Behavioral Health Professionals in Schools Quality and Diversity Grant Program to assist in preparing students to provide behavioral health services and to aid students from historically underrepresented populations to become behavioral health professionals.

MSEA represents 76,000 educators and school employees who work in Maryland's public schools, teaching and preparing our almost 900,000 students for the careers and jobs of the future. MSEA also represents 39 local affiliates in every county across the state of Maryland, and our parent affiliate is the 3-million-member National Education Association (NEA).

Maryland schools are facing a dire shortage of behavioral health professionals and other student support personnel as the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, isolation, and pervasive racial injustice strain students' wellbeing and increase the need for appropriate support. Moreover, evidence indicates that students of color benefit from working with behavioral health professionals who share their identity.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.chalkbeat.org/2019/11/20/21121875/it-s-not-just-teachers-how-counselor-diversity-matters-for-students-of-color>.



As we continue our efforts to recruit and retain teachers of color through the Blueprint for Maryland's Future and the efforts of local jurisdictions, we must approach with similar urgency the recruitment of underrepresented behavioral health professionals. By investing in the training of future behavioral health professionals, this legislation would bring necessary resources to ensuring that students are well supported, schools are adequately staffed, and that the behavioral health professionals in Maryland schools reflect the diversity of the student body.

**We urge the committee to issue a Favorable Report on House Bill 916.**