

Testimony before the Senate Health, Education, and Environmental Affairs Committee  
House Bill 752: Public Schools - School Psychologist Recruitment Program

**\*\*SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENT\*\***

April 4, 2022

There is a crisis in mental health among Maryland youth. In data reported in 2022, 67,000 Maryland youth had a major depressive episode in the past year (14.93%). Of these youth, 44.7%—32,000 of our children—received no treatment<sup>1</sup>. In February 2022, the Hopeful Futures Campaign published *America's School Mental Health Report Card*, which ranked states on a scale of 1 to 3 across eight policy indicators that support school mental health. Their report documented that Maryland does not meet recommended ratios for the school psychologists, school counselors, or school social workers to address our youth's important mental health needs.<sup>2</sup>

The problem with recruitment and retention being addressed by this bill is not limited to school psychologists. The leadership in Maryland's schools are reporting difficulties with hiring and retaining school mental health personnel in all disciplines. On February 21, 2022 WJLA news reported that Montgomery County was able to hire only two school social workers for the fifty open positions that they had for the current school year.

NASW is the largest national organization of the profession, representing over 120,000 social workers nationwide, with 16,000 licensed in the state of Maryland. Over 500 social workers are currently employed in public schools in our state, assisting students and families so that children can learn, grow, and thrive. As licensed mental health professionals, school social workers are meeting every day with students whose anxiety, depression, or other emotional challenges interfere with their ability to profit from the instruction that their teachers provide. School social workers are the only MSDE-certificated educational professionals who are also universally-licensed mental health providers under Maryland's Health Occupations Code.

The Blueprint for Maryland's Future recognized the need to attract and retain a high-quality teaching workforce and included a career ladder that would provide the means to do so. We have now created a two-tiered wage system for the educational workforce in our state, leaving behind our non-teaching professionals. While we support the goals of HB 752, we would suggest that a more comprehensive approach is critically needed.

Respectfully,

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Executive Director, NASW-MD

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<sup>1</sup> <https://mhanational.org/issues/state-mental-health-america>

<sup>2</sup> Maryland's School Report Card, p. 100 at

<https://onedrive.live.com/?cid=509408956B911AC1&id=509408956B911AC1%217560&parId=509408956B911AC1%215933&o=OneUp>