



**2022 SESSION
POSITION PAPER**

BILL: SB 856 – Public Schools – Health Services – School Nurses

COMMITTEE: Senate - Finance Committee

POSITION: Letter of Concern

BILL ANALYSIS: SB 856 would require each county board of education to provide a full-time registered nurse in each public school.

POSITION RATIONALE: Senate Bill (SB) 856 would require every public school in Maryland to have a full-time registered nurse (RN). School nurses play an important role in promoting health, wellness and learning in Maryland public schools. The Maryland Association of County Health Officers (MACHO) fully supports the intent behind SB 856, but from a practical standpoint, we are concerned the lack of existing funds and the currently strained nursing applicant pool will prevent school systems and local health departments from carrying out the sponsor's intentions.

Of Maryland's 24 local health departments, approximately 14 are directly responsible for hiring and employing nurses for the public schools in their jurisdiction. In the rest of the jurisdictions, this responsibility falls on the school system. Due to the unique needs and constraints in each jurisdiction, LHDs work closely with public school systems to determine how nursing services will be provided. Some jurisdictions have an RN in each school, others have licensed practical nurses, and some utilize unlicensed health staff working under the appropriate supervision of an RN who may be responsible for more than one school. Requiring every school to have a full time RN will place an unfunded mandate on many LHDs and school systems, especially in the setting of the COVID-worsened nursing shortage.

We encourage the legislature to work with the members of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future to design a comprehensive and practical plan for school-based health services. Such a plan should prioritize essential school health services including vision care and eyeglasses, behavioral health screening and therapy, optimizing asthma management, and general nursing care. A sustainably funded, unified plan that prioritizes essential healthcare building blocks would be preferable to isolated and financially unfeasible initiatives. A tiered strategy to sequentially expand on core healthcare measures should be mapped out. In addition, bridges between in-school services and community providers should be envisioned to achieve better outcomes and coordinate more specialized care for students in need.

For these reasons, the Maryland Association of County Health Officers submits this letter of concern for SB 856. For more information, please contact Ruth Maiorana, MACHO Executive Director at rmaiora1@jhu.edu or 410-937-1433. *This communication reflects the position of MACHO.*