

SHANEKA HENSON
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Appropriations Committee



The Maryland House of Delegates
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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

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Chair: Delegate Vanessa Atterbeary
Vice Chair: Delegate Alonzo Washington
6 Bladen Street Room 131
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Washington and Members of the House Ways and Means Committee, thank you for the opportunity to introduce HB1349 Education Support Professional-Workgroup and Bonus.

Schools function as cornerstones of our communities in both ordinary and extraordinary times. During the pandemic, it was further emphasized that educators are essential members of our communities. We often provide praise to teachers, and though all educators deserve kudos, the work and contributions of education support professionals (ESPs) are often overlooked and under-appreciated. As we see staggering shortages of bus drivers and other support staff, it is important that we take steps to make sure our support staff feel valued and supported.

The pandemic raised the profile of support staff and their jobs as fellow educators. Administrators, elected leaders, and parents depended on their expertise and commitment to students and families for small group virtual learning, the distribution and maintenance of devices, record-keeping and tracking of ever-changing policies, endless upkeep of school systems and safety protocols, and breakfasts and lunches (and holiday meals) for entire school communities.

However, low wages have been a barrier to recruit and retain these valuable school employees. More than half of support staff working full time in 2020-2021 earned less than \$35,000. Many support staff work two or three jobs and struggle to provide for their families, buy homes, save

for their futures, and afford community or four-year college tuition for their children to learn a trade and plan a career.

We need short and long term solutions to better support these important school staff. HB 1349 would utilize the current budget surplus to give support staff a \$500 bonus in FY23 and FY24 and create a workgroup to investigate support staff wages and present ways to improve them to the General Assembly to inform future legislation.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Shaneka Henson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being more prominent.

Delegate Shaneka Henson