



OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Marc Elrich
County Executive

March 10, 2022

TO: The Honorable Vanessa E. Atterbeary
Chair, Ways and Means Committee

FROM: Marc Elrich
County Executive

RE: House Bill 1349, *Education Support Professionals – Workgroup and Bonus*, Support

I am writing to express my strong support for House Bill 1349 – *Education Support Professionals – Workgroup and Bonus*, which seeks to provide \$500 bonuses in each of the next two fiscal years to education support professionals (ESPs) in our public schools, including paraeducators, bus operators, office staff, building services workers, food service workers, media assistants, warehouse workers, security officers, and other noncertified staff. Importantly, the bill also creates a workgroup to study wages for ESPs across the State to determine the percentage of ESPs who currently earn a living wage and the extent to which wages must be raised over the long term to ensure that our schools can attract and retain skilled workers.

Filling ESP positions was hard for school systems before the pandemic but recruiting and retaining these professionals has reached a crisis level over the past two years, with staffing shortages reported in jurisdictions across the State. The dedicated support staff who provided our students with transportation, nutritious meals, classroom support, technology support, clean and safe schools, and numerous other services that kept our schools functioning during the pandemic, and who continue to provide essential services that contribute so significantly to the maintenance of safe, healthy, and positive learning environments, have not received the respect and recognition that they deserve or the commensurate compensation that ensures that our schools can continue to recruit and retain outstanding people in these important positions.

Although the Blueprint for Maryland's Future includes significant increases to teacher compensation over the coming years, it does not address compensation for ESPs in any way. Providing much deserved bonuses to our ESPs would be a wise use of the State's current budget surplus. It is a very small step that can be taken over the next two years pending completion of the workgroup's comprehensive evaluation of ESP wages and issuance of recommendations for addressing pay parity in a more meaningful way over the long run. Our schools simply cannot function well without talented and dedicated ESPs and it is critical that we take steps as soon as possible to make sure that they are valued and supported appropriately.

I respectfully request that the Ways and Means Committee vote favorable on House Bill 1349 and that the Committee work with the Appropriations Committee to ensure that sufficient funding is included in the fiscal 2023 State budget to provide a \$500 bonus to ESPs throughout the State.