

SB 735_ Workgroup to Study the Wages of Education

Uploaded by: Alexa Thomas

Position: FAV



PSSAM
Public School Superintendents' Association
OF MARYLAND

Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director
1217 S. Potomac Street
Baltimore, MD 21224
410-935-7281
marypat.fannon@pssam.org

BILL: SB 735

TITLE: Workgroup to Study the Wages of Education Support Professionals

DATE: March 8, 2023

POSITION: Support with Amendments

COMMITTEE: Budget and Taxation / Education, Energy, and the Environment

CONTACT: Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director, PSSAM

The Public School Superintendents' Association of Maryland (PSSAM), on behalf of all twenty-four public school superintendents, **supports** Senate Bill 735 with **one amendment**.

Senate Bill 735 would establish the Workgroup to Study the Wages of Education Support Professionals to determine what percentage of education support professionals in the State earn a living wage, as well as look into increasing the wages of education support professionals in order to attract and retain talent.

PSSAM supports the establishment of this workgroup. The COVID-19 pandemic truly highlighted the imperative role educational support staff play in the learning environment, and superintendents champion any initiative to recruit and retain these team members.

PSSAM requests one amendment - that one member of the group is a superintendent or a representative of PSSAM. As the chief executive of their school districts, superintendents play a critical part in any budgetary discussions and consideration involving the education workforce. Maryland's superintendents value education support professionals and the work they do in all public schools, and PSSAM would welcome the opportunity to be a part of this study to ensure living wages for everyone working in our school systems.

Again, educational support professionals are essential to achieving the goals outlined by the Blueprint for Maryland's Future, and in providing a world-class education for all students. For these reasons, PSSAM **supports** Senate Bill 735 and requests a favorable report with the amendment described above.

SB735 _MSEA_Bost_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Cheryl Bost

Position: FAV

**Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 735
Workgroup to Study the Wages of Education Support Professionals**

**Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
March 8, 2023**

**Cheryl Bost
President**

The Maryland State Education Association supports Senate Bill 735. Senate Bill 735 establishes a workgroup to study the wages of education support professionals (ESPs) across Maryland to determine what percentage of ESPs earn a living wage. The workgroup would also be tasked with studying an increase in the wages of ESPs in order to attract and retain skilled workers. The workgroup would submit its final report with its findings and recommendations to the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee, the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee, the House Appropriations Committee, and the House Ways and Means Committee. Members of the workgroup would include essential stakeholders, including representatives of ESPs labor unions, to conduct this critical study.

MSEA represents 75,000 educators and school employees who work in Maryland's public schools, teaching and preparing our almost 900,000 students so they can pursue their dreams. 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).

ESPs are crucial for a well-functioning and healthy school environment. ESPs provide a wide variety of necessary skills and services for students and educators, including food service for students, making certain students arrive and leave school safely, providing instructional and behavioral support to students in general and special education classrooms, conducting administrative and clerical work in the front office, and connecting students with the additional supports they need. In short, ESPs make

it possible for schools to run; without them, students and educators would not have the support they need to learn in school or thrive in the workplace.

Unfortunately, schools are facing critical staffing shortages in both ESP positions and educator positions. From October 2019 through October 2021, employment levels for essential ESP positions, such as bus drivers, custodians, and teaching assistants decreased by 14.7%, 6.0%, and 2.6%, respectively.¹ Staffing shortages have persisted into the 2022-2023 school year. A majority, and in most instances an overwhelming majority, of public schools across the country are reporting difficulties with filling vacancies in ESP positions such as, administrative staff, transportation staff, custodial staff, and technology specialists.²

Maryland has the opportunity to stem the tide of ESP staffing shortages and make certain that schools are fully staffed to support students and educators. Senate Bill 735 will allow an inclusive stakeholder group to study in depth the salary conditions of ESPs and make recommendations to retain and recruit more individuals to become ESPs in Maryland's public schools.

We urge the committee to issue a Favorable Report on Senate Bill 735.

¹ David Cooper and Sebastian Martinez Hickey, Economic Policy Institute, *Raising pay in public K-12 schools is critical to solving staffing shortages*, p. 6 (Feb. 3, 2022), <https://files.epi.org/uploads/244445.pdf>.

² Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, *School Pulse Panel*, (select "staffing" tab), (Data collected June 2022 and August 2022), <https://ies.ed.gov/schoolsurvey/spp/>.

Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 735.pdf

Uploaded by: Cindy Porter

Position: FAV

Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 735
Workgroup to Study the Wages of Education Support Professionals
Senate Budget and Tax Committee
March 8, 2023
1:00 PM

Cindy Porter
Carroll Association of School Employees

Good afternoon, Chair Guzzone and Honorable Members of the Budget and Tax Committee. My name is Cindy Porter, and I am a veteran Education Support Professional, currently in my twenty-fourth year working as a Special Education Paraprofessional in the Carroll County Public School System. I am here today to provide testimony in support of SB735, a bill which would establish a workgroup to study the wages of Education Support Professionals and find a long-term solution to attract and retain skilled workers in professions that continue to gain foundational importance in the education of students across our state.

Personally, what began over twenty-three years ago for me as an Instructional Assistant, has exponentially expanded into a career requiring extensive background knowledge in educational curriculum, interventions, and most importantly, student emotional, behavioral, and mental health. At one time during my career, I worked two jobs for just under fourteen years, and three jobs for just under twelve years. During this time, I was also a mother of three who volunteered for extra-curricular parent groups and attended college when I could, finally earning my associate degree after eighteen years in 2019.

You might wonder why I speak about “My Story”. At the age of sixty-two, with over twenty-three years in my profession and two years credit given for my military service, I earn just over \$35,000 per year. Please know that figure also includes wages earned working summer programs and some paid after-school opportunities.

For the past eighteen months, I have had the privilege to speak to other Education Support Professionals across our state because of my work with the Maryland State Education Association. These professionals feed our students, open, close, and maintain our schools, enroll students, handle school finances and administrative paperwork, greet the public and handle family and student concerns, maintain the technology which our students now utilize every day, transport students in buses twice a day, develop crucial relationships with these students who require more emotional, behavioral and academic support than ever before, and unfortunately, sometimes sustain injury because of some of those student behaviors. Many are working more than one job, and some are choosing between necessities for their families. Their

hearts are big. Their desire to help our students succeed is even bigger. But the earnings of many support professionals are not reflective of the essential nature of their positions.

The workgroup that would be created by the passage of this bill would provide an opportunity to gain a better understanding of the support professionals who dedicate themselves to the students of our state and find meaningful solutions to retain and continue to recruit highly qualified applicants for these essential school system positions. With that in mind, I respectfully ask the committee to vote in favor of SB735.

SB753-FAV-AFSCME-ESP Study.pdf

Uploaded by: Cindy Smalls

Position: FAV



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SB735 Workgroup to Study the Wages of Education Support Professional
Budget & Taxation Committee
March 8, 2023

Favorable

AFSCME support SB 753. This bill establishes the Workgroup to Study the Wages of Education Support Professionals staffed by the Maryland State Department of Education. In determining what percentage of Education Support Professional earn a living wage in the State and to study increasing the wages of ESPs to attract and retain skilled workers, the workgroup must consider specified matters.

School support staff play an important role in ensuring students are learning in a safe and supportive learning environment. Our AFSCME members are in transportation, food service, health services, paraprofessionals, security, and maintenance within Maryland Public schools. Employees. School support staff can foster positive, trusting relationships with students and improve school climate by encouraging parent and family involvement in their students' education. School support staff can go beyond the curriculum by providing youth development resources for families and teachers that address trauma-informed practices and positive behavioral interventions. Because students connect with school support staff on many occasions throughout the school day, support staff can model positive behavior and send positive messages to students as well.

Staffing shortage continues to be an issue within our schools and our support staff are being asked to do more with less and without the resources they need and the without the compensation that they deserve. The workload, low morale, and stress issues is what causes burnout and many to leave the school system. That's why SB753 is so important, and this study is needed to begin to address the resources our support staff need in our public schools. While we are thankful for the Blueprint for Maryland Future provides support to our schools and some ESP positions, we can do more.

Children need to be in a safe and healthy environment to flourish. There are many people who work together to make this happen, great teachers combined with great support staff. Let's give our support staff the resources they need and respect that they deserve.

For these reasons AFSCME ask for a favorable report on SB753.

American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, AFL-CIO

TEL (202) 429-1000 FAX (202) 429-1293 TDD (202) 659-0446 WEB www.afscme.org 1625 L Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036-5687

Corey Witherspoon Testimony in Support of SB 735 (

Uploaded by: Corey Witherspoon

Position: FAV

Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 735
Workgroup to Study the Wages of Education Support Professionals
Education, Energy and the Environment Committee
March 8, 2023
1:00pm

My name is Corey Witherspoon and I am a Wholeness Specialist for Pimlico Elementary Middle School in Baltimore, MD. I support Senate Bill 735, and I urge a favorable report on this bill.

When an irate parent came to the school wielding a weapon and wanting to cause harm on staff it was myself an Education Support Professional, or as we say in Baltimore, a PSRP member that deescalated her. I risked my own life to protect fellow staff. I am not an anomaly.

Every school has an ESP like me, Corey Witherspoon, that would risk their lives to save both staff and students. WE ARE WORTHY of wage increases. We are risking our lives to protect our schools. We are Frontline in our schools and our value can not be measured but should be compensated. Baltimore City Public Schools PSRP Members are vital to Baltimore City Public schools. We teach in classrooms, we practice case management, we provide mental health support, we serve as mentors, security, mediators, and group leaders. PSRP Members are the people that students trust. They let us know about issues of violence that are about to occur so it will not happen in the school buildings. Our work is admirable. We are para educators that help to make sure students get their accommodations and modifications in IEPs.

We are multitasking educators that have to teach young people at different educational levels. We are problem solvers, advocates, community leaders, motivators, AND testing proctors.

Our schools are overcrowded but undermanned causing educational support professionals to be overwhelmed. We overcome our travails for the love of our students so that we can serve our young people with the greatest professionalism. You cannot sustain a school without us. Educational Support Staff, work out of love because it's needed but we cannot continue to work for free. In Baltimore we work in areas like Park Heights, Druid Hill AND Edmondson that's surrounded by darkness. Education Support Professionals are the light that teaches our young people that education is important and that if they really want to change Baltimore then it starts with education.

Educational Support Professionals teach our young people how to be good Baltimoreans. We manage payrolls and make staff get paid all across our school system. In the wake of the COVID

pandemic, our ESP members conducted covid tracing to ensure safety in schools to prevent a potential breakout. ESPs handle retirement and benefit packages so that all district staff can be compensated and can contribute to making our schools better.

In Baltimore, ESPs include our community school coordinators who risk their lives going into dangerous neighborhoods to make sure our young people have the services that they need. Our Cafeteria Workers fed our students during the shutdown of schools regardless of their fears about catching the virus and will do it again at moments notice. We are the frontline and the unheralded heroes in Baltimore's Schools. We must be respected and respect comes with more than a thank you. You show respect to one by rewarding them financially so that they can focus on the work instead of how they are going to pay their bills.

SB 735 provides a much needed study to ensure that Educational Support Professionals across Maryland are paid adequately for the works we do.

I strongly urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 735.

SB0735_FAV_Poper.pdf

Uploaded by: Cynthia Poper

Position: FAV

Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 735
Workgroup to Study the Wages of Education Support Professionals
Senate Budget and Tax Committee
March 8, 2023
1:00pm

Cynthia F. Poper
Harford County Education Association

Greetings Chair Guzzone and Honorable Members of the Budget and Tax Committee. My name is Cynthia Poper, and I am an Education Support Professional in Harford County Public Schools. Today I am providing testimony in support of SB 735, a bill that would establish a workgroup that would be instrumental in working towards resolving the systemic issues of low wages and poor retention of Education Support Professionals in our Maryland school systems.

I am 66 years old. Education is my third career. I have a bachelor's degree from Goucher College. I am a 16-year veteran ESP and even with market adjustments of our salaries over the last two years by HCPS, I make just barely \$40,000 a year. I am considered a highly paid ESP.

In my work with the Maryland State Education Association, I have had the opportunity to talk to ESPs across the state. Time and time again I have heard stories about the sacrifices that ESPs have had to make because of their extremely low salaries. Most ESPs earn under \$30,000 a year. Many work two or three jobs. Some have to rely on the gratitude of others, just to survive, and some incur stigma from participating in public assistance programs, even when working a full time job.

Education Support Professionals are not something that our school systems can do without. They are the glue that hold our schools and many times, our students together. They make it possible for the neediest student to be successful and advance through school. They keep the buildings clean, heated, cooled, and safe, they ensure that our students have food to eat, they open and close the buildings each day and see that needed repairs are made. They keep

computers running, answer the phones and greet parents when they enter our buildings. They are a necessity to the success of our schools yet they are paid at lower rates than many fast-food restaurants or big box stores. ESPs may not have teaching certificates, but we are all educators and work daily to support our students.

These important professionals deserve your attention. They deserve the workgroup this bill seeks to convene. They deserve the potential solutions this bill could provide. Education Support Professionals are asking for your help.

I respectfully ask the committee to return a favorable vote on SB 735.

SB 735 - Workgroup to Study the Wages of Education

Uploaded by: Donna Edwards

Position: FAV



MARYLAND STATE & D.C. AFL-CIO

AFFILIATED WITH NATIONAL AFL-CIO

7 School Street • Annapolis, Maryland 21401-2096

Balto. (410) 269-1940 • Fax (410) 280-2956

President

Donna S. Edwards

Secretary-Treasurer

Gerald W. Jackson

**SB 735 - Workgroup to Study the Wages of Education Support Professionals
Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
March 8, 2023**

SUPPORT

**Donna S. Edwards
President**

Maryland State and DC AFL-CIO

Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of SB 735. My name is Donna S. Edwards, and I am the President of the Maryland State and District of Columbia AFL-CIO. On behalf of Maryland's 300,000 union members, I offer the following comments.

Maryland has over 56,000 education support professionals but they are left behind in statewide discussions about school staffing shortages.¹ The term education support professional includes our paraeducators, clerical workers, custodial staff, food service workers, and more who all provide valuable services to our students and make our public education system possible. Despite their importance to our schools, these workers are underpaid with the average education support professional making just \$40,523 per year for full time work. Nearly 50% make less than \$35,000 per year.

Last year's FY2023 budget included \$8 million for local education agencies to issue bonuses to their education support professionals, but bonuses will not fix systemic underpayment. We support SB 735's approach to ensuring that labor unions are fully involved in the process of discussing issues that impact their members.

We urge the committee to issue a favorable report for SB 735.

¹ National Education Association, "Education Support Professional Earnings Report." NEA Research, April 2022.

Franca Muller Paz Favorable SB 735.pdf

Uploaded by: Franca Muller

Position: FAV

Workgroup to Study the Wages of Education Support Professionals

SB 735

Official Testimony

Position: **FAVORABLE**

To the Budget & Taxation Committee,

My name is Franca Muller Paz, I am a teacher of 13 years & educator in Baltimore City for the last 10. I'm a District 46 Baltimore City resident and an elected member of the Baltimore Teachers Union Executive Board. Workgroup to Study the Wages of Education Support Professionals SB735.

I am writing today to express the importance of studying the wages of paraeducators. Paraeducators are a vital part of our education system, providing essential support to teachers and students. They work in a variety of roles, such as instructional aides, special education assistants, and language translators. Despite their crucial role in the education system, paraeducators are often paid low wages.

It is crucial to study the wages of paraeducators because they play a critical role in supporting the education of our children. Paraeducators work directly with students, providing one-on-one support and facilitating small group learning. They assist teachers in creating lesson plans, grading assignments, and managing classroom behavior. Without the support of paraeducators, our education system would not be able to function effectively.

However, despite their importance, paraeducators are often paid low wages. Many paraeducators are part-time employees, which means they do not receive benefits such as health insurance or retirement plans. This makes it difficult for them to make ends meet and can lead to high turnover rates.

Studying the wages of paraeducators would provide important insights into the challenges they face and help identify ways to improve their working conditions. By raising wages and providing benefits, we can attract and retain high-quality paraeducators who are committed to supporting the education of our children.

In addition, raising the wages of paraeducators would also benefit our education system as a whole. Research has shown that a stable and well-compensated workforce is essential for creating a high-quality education system. When paraeducators are paid fairly, they are more likely to be satisfied with their jobs, which in turn can lead to better outcomes for students.

In conclusion, I urge a favorable vote on SB 735 to study the wages of paraeducators. I hope that soon after, we can use this information to take action to improve their working conditions. By investing in our paraeducators, we are investing in the future of our children and our education system.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Franca Muller Paz
BCPSS Teacher and BTU Building Representative
franca.muller@gmail.com
201 888 5618

SB 735.Education Support Professionals Wage Study.

Uploaded by: John Woolums

Position: FAV

BILL: Senate Bill 735
TITLE: Workgroup to Study the Wages of Education Support Professionals
DATE: March 8, 2023
POSITION: SUPPORT
COMMITTEE: Budget & Taxation
Education, Energy, and the Environment
CONTACT: John R. Woolums, Esq.

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) supports Senate Bill 735 to establish the Workgroup to Study the Wages of Education Support Professionals to study and make recommendations regarding the adequacy of wages of education support professionals. MABE agrees that such a study is needed to analyze and explain the policies and funding decisions available to the Governor and legislature to enhance school systems' abilities to recruit, competitively compensate, and retain these essential support personnel in every school system across the state.

MABE supported similar legislation in 2022. However, Senate Bill 831 (Ch. 532) was enacted to invest in bonuses for education support staff but amended to remove the provisions establishing the wage study workgroup. Again, MABE is supporting Senate Bill 735 in recognition of the value of the many and varied roles of school system support staff who contribute so significantly to the operations of school facilities, transportation, and other services as well as to the teaching and learning of students.

Education support professionals include a broad range of noncertificated staff members, including: teachers' aides and paraeducators, administrative assistants, custodians, bus drivers, facilities maintenance staff, security and technology staff, food service workers, and many other critically important school employees. The Blueprint for Maryland's Future ensures new statewide systems of compensation, working conditions, and professional development for certain educational staff, and increases per pupil funding to support these initiatives.

MABE supports actions by the General Assembly to provide sufficient state funding to compensate all educators and educational support professionals in line with the initiatives contained with the Blueprint. Again, local boards recognize that these professionals are essential to achieving the goals outlined by the Blueprint and successful day-to-day operations of 1,400 school serving nearly 900,000 students every school day.

For these reasons, MABE requests a favorable report on Senate Bill 735.

L Robinson Testimony in Support of SB735.pdf

Uploaded by: Litarsha Robinson

Position: FAV

Dear Committee Members,

My name is Litarsha Robinson, and I am a Special Education Paraeducator in Baltimore City Public Schools. I am also a resident of district 45 and a member of the Paraprofessionals and School Related Personnel Chapter of the Baltimore Teachers Union. I am writing to you to ask you to support Senate Bill 735, which will create a workgroup to study a living wage and wage increases for education support professionals across Maryland.

Education Support Professionals are the heart and soul of school operations. We support students behaviorally and academically, and we are the paraeducators, one-on-one aides, clerical, cafeteria, and transportation staff that keep students safe, healthy, and positive as they learn and grow. We were left out of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future, even though the law created new job requirements for some paraprofessionals. It is wonderful that our schools are getting more funding to assist students in concentrated poverty, and that teacher wages across the state will be increasing. But it takes more than teachers to provide a world class education to Maryland's young people. When students need extra academic or behavioral attention, schools count on incredible educators like myself to fill in the gaps. With teacher shortages, education support professionals have been called on to step up more than ever, as substitutes, and in support roles that keep our schools open and safe.

Even though the work we do is essential, we currently don't get paid like it is. Many PSRPs in Baltimore City are earning a subsistence wage, and need to work second jobs or after school programs to make ends meet. We are willing to go the extra mile for our students, but we deserve to be paid a wage that can support us, just like we support students. The economic challenges we are facing are considerable, and our wages just aren't keeping pace with inflation. Groceries, auto insurance, utilities and home internet are all increasing, not to mention housing and transportation costs. With costs increasing so rapidly, and our wages staying the same, the result is stress, and burnout. We need this workgroup to shine a light on the challenges so many of us face. For this reason, I urge the committee to support Senate Bill 735.

Michael Kranick BTU Testimony - Bill #HB1234 (SB07

Uploaded by: Michael Kranick

Position: FAV

Workgroup to Study the Wages of Education Support Professionals / BILL
#HB1234/#SB735

Official Testimony; Position: **FAVORABLE**

To the Senate's Budget & Taxation and Education, Energy, and the Environment, Ways and Means, and Appropriations Committees:

My name is Michael Kranick, and I'm a Baltimore resident, a Baltimore City Public Schools System Special Educator of Secondary ELA, and a proud member of the Baltimore Teachers Union. I support the Workgroup to Study the Wages of Education Support Professionals / BILL #HB1234/#SB735.

The results of the bill's study will finally bring light to the wage-inequities disproportionately affecting ESPs, or otherwise known in my district, PSRPs: Paraprofessionals and Paraeducators. PSRPs are the lifeblood of the school, and I will do my best to encapsulate the immeasurable & invaluable support, wisdom, and experience I have received while working with one paraeducator in particular: Mr. Lymon. Mr. Lymon was the most respected, dedicated, and beloved member of my school. He went above and beyond for anyone and everyone every single day no matter what was going on in his life or anyone else's. The man's patience, consistency, flexibility, and warmth radiated throughout the building as students and staff interacted with him. Whenever I was with Mr. Lymon, I knew everything was going to be just fine.

I began my teaching career in Baltimore City at my current (and only) school six years ago, and I was fortunate enough to have been paired with Mr. Lymon on my first day to teach Middle School ELA. Throughout the years, we continued to learn from each other, support each other, and became one of the best teaching teams at our school. When I transitioned from middle school to high school ELA, Lymon was right there with me as my rock and my teaching partner. Between watching our 8th graders from my first year of teaching to winning our school's Teacher and Para of the Year awards in the same year, we got to see the fruits of our labor and did not have to visualize our impact or efforts. We always joked that if the school closed or the district moved one of us, the other would follow because we were that good.

Unfortunately, this year, due to personal financial constraints and hardships, Mr. Lymon had to make a choice in order to provide for his family: a.) continue working within the position he had held for over a decade, the partnership we had over the past six years, and the students & staff he loved so much with no advancement in sight toward a living wage and risk financial ruin, or b.) explore other career opportunities that would provide a living wage. In the end, Mr. Lymon chose the latter because he had no other choice.

I believe that passing of this bill is essential because I know there are many other Lymon's in the ESP role who may have to face the nearly impossible choice between financial security and stability, or ruin. No one should have to live paycheck without being able to create a meager savings because of an unlivable wage, especially not the most effective ESP I have

had the invaluable privilege of calling my colleague and my friend. I respectfully urge this committee to issue a favorable decision to create a Workgroup to Study the Wages of Education Support Professionals so that no ESP will have to choose between the work they love and the work they need to survive.

Sincerely,

Michael Kranick

Special Educator - Secondary ELA, Baltimore City Public Schools System

Member of the Baltimore Teachers Union

Chair of the BTU Special Education Committee

570-903-9907

mrkranick@bcps.k12.md.us

michael.kranick.17@tfacorps.org

SEIU Local 500 in FAVOR of SB 735 - Workgroup to S

Uploaded by: Pia Morrison

Position: FAV



**Hearing Testimony March 8, 2023
Senate Budget and Tax Committee
Service Employees International Union, Local 500, CTW, CLC**

Senate Bill 735: Workgroup to Study the Wages of Education Support Professionals

SUPPORT

Chairman Guzzone, Vice Chair Rosapepe, and members of the Senate Budget and Tax Committee,

Thank you, everyone. It's great to be with you today. My name is Pia Morrison, President of SEIU Local 500. SEIU Local 500 represents approximately 20,000 working people in Montgomery County and across our region. Our membership includes the thousands of support staff at Montgomery County Public Schools, part-time faculty at Montgomery College, childcare providers, and more. We are the largest and fastest growing public sector union in the county and state.

I am proud to stand here alongside Senator Zucker, MSEA, and other organizations in support of Senate Bill 735 – SEIU Local 500 represents over 9,000 support staff at MCPS which is the largest school district in Maryland. We represent para-educators, bus operators, office staff, building service workers, food service workers, and many more. On behalf of the thousands of support staff members we want to thank Senator Zucker for being a champion of K12 education and our members.

Senate Bill 735 forms a workgroup to study wages for support staff across our state and make recommendations on how to attract and retain staff.

Support staff are essential to the school day. But for far too long they have not gotten the respect nor the recognition that they deserve. School support staff are the backbone of the safe, healthy, and supportive learning and working environment that must exist if educators and students are to succeed. Many are second or third generation school employees who contribute to the communities they live in. For their extraordinary and essential commitment, support staff deserve a fair wage and recognition for the value they bring to education.

During the pandemic our food and nutrition staff continued preparing and distributing thousands of meals for students each day; security staff that helped at schools with the distribution of the meals, and bus drivers delivered meals to those schools and helped to distribute them to families.

Our instructional technology staff, including media assistants, worked to support the delivery, repair, and operations of thousands of Chromebooks and internet hot-spots for all students and teachers.

Building service workers performed additional sanitizing procedures in buildings. It was the maintenance workers that worked diligently to test air quality, change filters, and set-up air purifiers where needed.

**Service Employees International Union, Local 500, CtW, CLC
901 Russell Avenue, Gaithersburg, MD 20879
301-740-7100 www.seiu500.org
Pia Morrison, President**



Warehouse workers received, sorted, and distributed masks, sanitizing wipes, hand sanitizers, and later distributing KN95 masks and home testing kits.

Secretaries immediately pivoted to perform their duties digitally while remaining responsive to their administrators, staff, and parents.

And it was para-educators that dove into learning all the new instructional technologies so they could continue to support their teachers and students with online learning.

It was the effort that all these individuals did while continuing to support student and family wellbeing, while also tending to their own family and personal wellbeing.

According to the Economic Policy Institute, low pay is a long-standing issue for support staff, the median weekly wage for food services workers was \$331, was \$493 for school bus drivers and \$507 for paraeducators. Also, nearly every state has experienced significant losses in local public education employment because of the pandemic. Education support staff are vital to school operations. As we look forward to the implementation of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future, my hope is that lawmakers use that opportunity to raise the wages of education support staff professionals so that they can live in the counties where they provide such critical services to the community.

For these reasons, SEIU Local 500 supports SB 735 and we ask that you vote yes and urge a favorable committee report.

Sally Murek testimony SB735 ESP Wage Study Workgro

Uploaded by: Sally Murek

Position: FAV

Speaker: Sally Murek, Montgomery County Public Schools, Coordinator, Paraeducator Program

Occasion: Testimony for Workgroup to Study the Wages of Education Support Professionals – SB735

Location: Senate Budget and Tax Committee hearing, Annapolis

Date: Wednesday, March 8, 2023

Who: SEIU Local 500, VP Paraeducator chapter

Good afternoon, committee members, and thank you for this opportunity to be with you today to share my strong support for Senate Bill 735. My name is Sally Murek and I am a paraeducator with Montgomery County Public Schools where I have worked to support staff and the instruction of students for 32 years. I want to say a special thank you to Senator Zucker for his leadership on this important issue.

Much has been shared with you in previous testimonies of how the heroes of the school system stepped up during the pandemic to ensure instruction continued for our students, our children. I wish to expand on the courage, flexibility, and stamina of the paraeducators. They were called upon to pivot instantly into a digital instructional world. Alongside of teachers, they took multiple and daily just-in-time trainings to learn all the virtual platforms and tools that would be available and needed to deliver virtual instruction which was effective and engaging. On top of the hours of technological trainings, they had to establish their “home classrooms” and set up technology for virtual delivery while spending hours collaborating with their peers and teachers. And they had to form their own small groups of students with teacher guidance while figuring out how to continue to support the students they were already supporting. Many also had to supervise their own children through their digital learning classes and being at home rather than in school or child care. Paraeducators had to handle the trauma and anxiety of the pandemic for themselves, their families, and their loved ones while carrying on with their prescribed task of engaging our students in effective differentiated instruction.

Educational support professionals, specifically paraeducators, were left out of the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future for them to be recognized and respected as the integral partners in student instruction and learning that they are. They were removed in the eleventh hour before passage of the bill, and I hope the workgroup being formed by this legislation will rectify that mistake. They serve as co-educators and are due the same respect and recognition.

Montgomery County Public Schools has approximately 2700 paraeducators. 60% have a four-year degree, another 20% have master’s degrees and we have a number that hold Ph.Ds. Our paras have CHOSEN this as their career, not because it is “all they can do.” They love supporting the academics and growth of our students. They are flexible and willing to use their instructional knowledge and skills to quickly support school operations and instructional needs in real time as situations arise. During COVID, and continuing through our current school year, many, many paras have stepped in to be teachers covering classes for a day, a week, and even as long-term subs because of high staff absenteeism and unfilled teacher positions.

Paras build relationships to envelop and promote the whole-child. It is not uncommon for students to have deeper relationships with paras, or other educational support professionals, rather than with their teacher. Paras are quick to pick up on subtle changes in a child's behavior in unstructured settings such as specials, and lunch and recess. They may see a gregarious child become quiet and withdrawn at recess, or a child who usually brings lunch to school to suddenly not bringing lunch and not wanting the "free" lunch that is offered. These social-emotional observations are then shared with teachers and counselors as possible "red flags." They also provide continuity to families by being there for siblings and cousins as they progress through a school.

Paraeducators love working in schools and supporting the academic and well-being development of our students, but they have financial needs and families, too. Low wages are affecting our recruitment and retention of these valuable and educated employees. Many must work second jobs and struggle to provide for their families, buy homes, and provide for their futures. We have heard terrible stories of paras being homeless and living out of their cars even though they are fully employed by our schools. Many cannot afford to live in the county where they work. More than half of all support staff working full time in 2021-2022 earned less than \$35,000. 70% were paid less than \$45,000. They are "essential" but are not paid as if they are. Paras, and educational support professionals, are the backbone of our schools. They deserve a fair wage and recognition for the value they bring to education.

In closing, I ask for your support to pass Senate Bill 735. Our schools are worth it – our educational support staff are worth it – our children are worth it.

SB735_Zucker_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Senator Craig Zucker

Position: FAV

CRAIG J. ZUCKER
Legislative District 14
Montgomery County



James Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street, Room 122
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3625 • 301-858-3625
800-492-7122 Ext. 3625
Fax 410-841-3618 • 301-858-3618
Craig.Zucker@senate.state.md.us

Budget and Taxation Committee
Chair, Capital Budget Subcommittee

Chair, Senate Democratic Caucus

THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony of Senator Craig J. Zucker
Senate Bill – 735 Workgroup to Study the Wages of Education Support Professionals
Budget & Taxation Committee
March 8, 2023
1:00PM
Position: Favorable

Good afternoon, Chairman Guzzone, Vice Chairman Rosapepe, and distinguished members of the committee. It is my pleasure to testify today in **support of Senate Bill – 735 Workgroup to Study the Wages of Education Support Professionals.**

Education Support Professional (ESP) are essential to the school day and are the backbone of a safe, healthy, and supportive learning and working environment that must exist for educators and students to succeed. Last year, the Senate voted unanimously to for the Maryland State Department of Education to form a workgroup to study wages of ESPs and to provide ESPs with a \$500 bonus. Ultimately, the bill was amended in the House of Delegates to remove the workgroup from the bill but kept the bonuses for ESPs.

The Maryland State Department of Education collected data on how many ESPs there are in the state and reported nearly 45,000 ESPs were eligible to receive a bonus, which came out to an average of \$179. Senate Bill 735 directs MSDE to create the study to investigate what percentage of ESPs in the state earn a living wage, study ways to increase wages to attract and retain these skilled workers – and report their findings and recommendations to the General Assembly.

It is imperative to study how many vacant ESP positions there are, their wages, and how we can support this group that was excluded from the Blueprint for Maryland's Future. There is no fiscal note for this Senate Bill 735, and it will match the intent of the legislation passed by the Senate last year.

For these reasons, I urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 735. Thank you for your kind consideration.

Shamirror Riley Testimony in Support of SB 735.pdf

Uploaded by: Shamirror Riley

Position: FAV

Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 735
Workgroup to Study the Wages of Education Support Professionals
Education, Energy and the Environment Committee

March 8, 2023

1:00pm

Hi, my name is Shamirror Riley, I am a Secretary at Park Heights Academy in Baltimore, MD and I am also a Paraprofessional and School Related Personal and member of the Baltimore Teachers Union. I support Senate Bill 735, and I urge a favorable report on this bill.

School secretaries are the heart of the school. We are the front-line workers that held our schools together during the pandemic. I believe we have earned the right to receive improvements to our current wages. There are Educational Support Professionals doing essential and incredible work all over the state of Maryland sustaining our schools and serving our communities. Educational Support Professionals, or PSRPs like we say in Baltimore, experience unique challenges working in the inner city of Baltimore. From not enough teachers to a lack of books, to outdated buildings that do not have proper air conditioning or heat.

Through it all, we still provide countless hours of hard work and dedication to our students way beyond our scheduled work hours. In addition to our job titles, PSRPs have stepped up to help fill many of the teacher vacancies that our schools are experiencing and we do so for much lower wages than a traditional teacher.

Additionally, due to inflation, most PSRPs can no longer afford our basic necessities. Our wages have not improved adequately over the years. Many of us have taken on second jobs just to make ends meet. This is why the study called for in SB735 is so important. It sheds light on how our low wages can't keep up with inflation and how this affects education support professionals in Baltimore and throughout the state.

SB 735 establishes a workgroup to study the wages of education support professionals to determine what percentage of ESPs and PSRPs in the State earn a living wage and to study increasing the wages of ESPs and PSRPs to attract and retain skilled workers like us.

A key component to solving our current staffing crisis in MD Public Schools is by recruiting and retaining educational support professionals.

SB 735 provides a much needed study to ensure that Educational Support Professionals across Maryland are paid adequately for the work we do and that we can stay in our professions and continue to serve our students, our communities and our school staff..

I strongly urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 735.

Public Testimony--SB 735.docx.pdf

Uploaded by: Takiyah Dingle

Position: FAV

**Public Testimony on SB 735—‘Establishing the Workgroup to Study the Wages of Education Support Professionals’
Wednesday, March 8, 2023**

Good Afternoon,

My name is Takiyah Dingle and I am the School Secretary for Arundel Elementary School in Cherry Hill. My comment this afternoon will be regarding the establishing of a workgroup to study the wages of Education Support Professionals (ESPs). There is absolutely no justification that a person working a 40hr. work week in public education this state, specifically in Baltimore City, where we work with some of the most challenging students and familial situations, should need to seek 2nd and 3rd jobs just so they can afford the most basic of human needs, like food, water, electricity, rent/mortgage. With the rate that cost-of living is rising, we should be embarrassed that we have full-time, *HARD*-working employees that are struggling to eat or have roofs over their heads.

I’m a single mom who lives so minimally and, after working for Baltimore City Public Schools for almost 12.5 yrs., I am struggling. I don’t have a fancy cell phone/phone plan, cable, new car, expensive clothes, credit cards or other things like that. But I do have student loans. I do have a child in college, a BG&E and water bill, a vehicle that I must put gas in to get to work and insurance that I must maintain on that vehicle. My basic needs exceed what I get paid monthly and I am constantly robbing Peter to pay Paul! I also live daily with the anxiety that one thing can break down and I am stuck. I am unable to maintain a savings account because there is nothing extra to save. It’s very frustrating and it makes me wonder why I’m doing what I’m doing! We are a society that values tossing a ball around more than we value educating the very people who we want to one day take care of us and lead our nation.

It is disheartening and, frankly, disrespectful, that we say how important and valuable education is to our maintaining our society, and yet those who are fostering that education have little to nothing to show for it. We ask so much of our ESPs. We are asked to work in hazardous situations that you yourself would not work in, like the pandemic, and then we are denied hazardous pay. People were quarantining, and we were asked to be in the buildings, to answer phones, to prepare work packets for the students and meals for families (in some cases deliver them), to deliver computers/hotspots or work packets to students. Endangering our own lives. Even when we were mandated to be home, we were told we had to forward school calls to our personal cell phones. We weren’t even provided work phones or work computers when we asked. And yet we still were expected to get the job done. So, in all the talk of how valuable and important we are to education, it feels very disingenuous to us because, at the end of the day, we are tired and still trying to get food on the table. Think of the mental health toll that takes on a person, **a society** trying to survive...

People are leaving education in record numbers and the reason is that people are tired, literally and figuratively. The school systems continue to get extra monies and yet the only people we really see reaping the benefits are those in the top tiers of the school districts, who aren’t just scrambling to fulfill their basic needs. When the workers of a system’s needs are met, you get a healthier, happier, more motivated worker and, in turn, a much better product. I’m asking for you to not continue to be a part of our problems, but to be a logical part of the solution! We can’t eat or pay bills with just words and notions. We’re looking for equity! Let’s begin with the establishment of a workgroup that can begin studying how we can get our ESPs livable wages!

I sincerely thank you for your time and hope you take immediate action to implement this!

The Heart and Pulse of a School.pdf

Uploaded by: Tamika Peters

Position: FAV

Tamika Peters
The Heart and Pulse of a School
Testimony in favor of SB 735 - Workgroup to Study the Wages of Education Support
Professionals
Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
Wednesday March 8, 2023

Good afternoon, my name is Tamika Peters and I am a Staff Associate at Liberty Elementary School in Baltimore Maryland. In my role I support students and develop educators to reach awesome heights every day. I am currently in the Paraprofessionals and School Related Personnel Chapter of the Baltimore Teachers Union. I am writing in support of SB 735 Workgroup to Study the Wages of Education Support Professionals.

Support Staff and Personnel are the heart and pulse of all educational systems. They are usually the first ones to arrive and the last to leave. In many districts, they are deemed essential as employees and in the need of supporting the staff and students in our school buildings. With all of that, the majority of support staff in Maryland school districts are not making a living wage. A living wage is defined as the minimum income necessary for a worker to meet their basic needs. Many support personnel do not make the minimum income to maintain a decent lifestyle of necessities. Due to this, they will work longer hours and/or work another job just to make his or her ends meet.

Support staff need to make a living wage. They need to be able to work on the level that they want and still be able to enjoy life. They do not need the fear of something in life happening that will put an extra strain on their already tight budget. Many support staff are just one paycheck or even one situation like car repairs, medical emergency etc away from failing even more behind in bills and maintaining the household. Once you add a family and regular living expenses, the majority of support staff are stressed. Any person that works in the school system, does it because they love what they do. They love their community and the people that they serve. Being in education is one of the most rewarding professions but also one of the the most underfunded , unappreciated and underpaid in the city, state and county. Increasing the living wage in Maryland will not only help with retention of these very important people in the school system, but also give a needed strength to the people we need to consider the heart and pulse of a school. For these reasons and more, I urge the committee to adopt a favorable report on SB 735.