

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.