

**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 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> 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!