

## 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

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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.**