

**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.