

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

**Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
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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/>.