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TESTIMONY OF SENATOR SHELLY HETTLEMAN
SB419 Nonpublic Schools - School Health Services Program - Eligibility for Participation

SB419 provides much needed funds to eligible nonpublic schools in Maryland so that every child has access to health services during their school day. According to the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) at least [128,498](#) children in Maryland were enrolled in nonpublic schools in the state. These children, like all children, have health needs that should be able to be addressed during the school day.

One of many things we learned during the three years of the COVID pandemic is the importance of healthcare professionals in our schools. Nurses and other healthcare professionals worked overtime determining whether students had the first signs of the virus or some other illness. Many of our small, nonpublic schools that provide education to low-income students are unable to afford a professional healthcare worker, such as a registered nurse, or may only have a part-time professional a day or two a week. Many schools rely on nonprofessionals who can only provide minimal care—such as determining a child’s temperature—or making calls to family when a child appears sick. They are not qualified to diagnose a student’s health problem.

This bill, as amended, would allow eligible, nonpublic schools to apply for up to \$40 per student reimbursement from the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) for the services of a certified nurse practitioner or a registered nurse—similar to services provided in public schools. This reimbursement would enable some nonpublic schools to at least afford a part-time professional to protect the health of their students. The bill would require an annual appropriation in the Governor’s budget of \$4 million, adjusted for inflation, to MSDE’s budget for allocation to counties for these reimbursements.

A nonpublic school would be eligible if it participates in the nonpublic schools “Textbook and Technology” grant program currently run by MSDE. Eligibility is based on the number of students in a school receiving free and reduced cost meals and the funding allocation per school is determined using a formula based on the percentage of student enrollment qualifying for free and reduced meals.

As of January 31, 2023, 414 childcare centers, elementary, middle, and high schools with 128,000 students were eligible for the textbook program. The bill as amended also requires that nonpublic schools receiving this reimbursement “not discriminate in student admissions, retention, or expulsion or against any student on the basis of race, color, national origin, sexual orientation, or gender identity or expression.”

I want to emphasize that these are schools that primarily serve low-income students with low tuition costs. We may be over the worst of the COVID pandemic, but we know it will not be the last major health crisis we face as a state or nation.

All children deserve access to school-based health care services, regardless of where they are educated. Having an environment conducive to their health, safety, and well-being must be prioritized in our state budget for all Maryland children. For this reason, I urge a favorable report on SB419. Thank you.