

**Testimony before the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
Senate Bill 482: Janet L. Hoffman Loan Assistance Repayment Program –
Mental Health Professionals in Public Schools**

****Support**
February 22, 2023**

On behalf of the National Association of Social Workers, Maryland Chapter (NASW-MD) Social Work in Schools Committee, we would like to express our strong support for Senate Bill 482: Janet L. Hoffman Loan Assistance Repayment Program - Mental Health Professionals in Public Schools.

NASW is the largest national organization of the profession, representing over 120,000 social workers nationwide, with 16,000 licensed in the state of Maryland. The Maryland Chapter's Social Work in Schools committee has 39 members who serve in public schools from Allegheny County to the Eastern Shore and from the Pennsylvania line to St. Mary's County. MSDE reports over 600 social workers employed by Maryland schools, with the number growing every year.

Schools provide a unique access point to meet the critical mental health needs of students so that they are emotionally available to profit from instruction. A Master's degree is required to be MSDE-certificated as a School Social Worker in Maryland and school social workers are often assigned to more than one school, usually beginning their professional career with higher student loan debt than their teaching peers. Behavioral health needs occur in children across the socioeconomic spectrum, so it has been nearly impossible for most school social workers to qualify for student debt relief under the current provisions of the Hoffman Loan Assistance Program's guidelines for teachers, which required full-time placement in a school with a Free and Reduced Meal rate of 75%.

Since there just aren't enough of us to meet existing needs, it is critical that we do what we can to attract and retain qualified individuals to serve our students and their families. Senate Bill 482 is a critical step in the right direction, and we urge you to return a favorable report.

Respectfully,

Gail L. Martin, LCSW-C
Chair, Social Work in Schools Committee
NASW-MD Chapter