



Senator Brian J. Feldman, Chair
Senator Cheryl C. Kagan, Vice Chair
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
2 West
Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

February 21, 2023

Bill: Senate Bill 482 - Janet L. Hoffman Loan Assistance Repayment Program - Mental Health Professionals in Schools

Position: **Support**

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Committee,

I am writing on behalf of the Maryland School Psychologists' Association (MSPA), a professional organization representing about 500 school psychologists in Maryland. We advocate for the social-emotional, behavioral, and academic well-being of students and families across the state.

We support the expansion of the Janet L. Hoffman Loan Assistance Repayment Program to include the opportunity for mental health professionals, including school psychologists, social workers, and mental health coordinators, to apply for loan repayment assistance. School psychologists provide essential services including psychological assessment, counseling, and crisis response, to many of Maryland's most vulnerable students. In order to become certified as a school psychologist, a school psychologist must complete a minimum of three years of graduate school. School psychologists pursuing a doctoral degree will spend more years in graduate school before becoming a certified or licensed school psychologist. Due to limitations in scholarship funding for graduate-level coursework, many school psychologists take out loans and accrue debt before beginning their public school careers. Such a financial burden of entering the field of school psychology acts as a barrier to the expansion and diversification of school psychologists in Maryland.

The current bill only seeks to expand who is able to apply for loan repayment assistance and does not require an increase in the amount of funds allocated to the Janet L. Hoffman Loan Assistance Repayment Program. Therefore, this is a solution with no additional cost that can assist in incentivizing school psychologists to remain in Maryland public schools instead of pursuing more lucrative careers in the private sector. It is also important that this bill, as written, allows for loan repayment assistance to be provided for mental health professionals who attend any accredited college or university because of the current need for Maryland school districts to recruit school psychologists who completed their training in other states. Currently, Maryland graduate programs do not produce enough school psychology graduates to fill the school psychology vacancies in the state. According to the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) Shortage Dashboard, 13 school psychologists graduated from Maryland programs in 2021. As of the 2022-2023 school year, Montgomery County Public Schools alone has 35 unfilled school psychologist positions, with colleagues in Baltimore City sharing they have 10 unfilled school psychologist positions and colleagues in Howard County indicating they have 4 vacancies.

If we can provide any further information or be of assistance, please contact us at legislative@mSPAonline.org or Sarah Peters at speters@hbstrategies.us or 410-322-2320.

Respectfully submitted,
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Committee Chair, Legislative Committee
Maryland School Psychologists' Association.