

Written Testimony to the Senate Finance Committee
Submitted by Jodi Barker
SB 201 - Maryland Medical Assistance and Children's Health Insurance Programs -
School-Based Behavioral Health Services - Reimbursement
February 7, 2023

SUPPORT

Good afternoon, Chair Griffith and members of the Committee. My name is Jodi Barker, and I am a School Counselor, and a member of BTU Local 340, the union for educational employees working for the Baltimore City Public School System. I ask for a favorable report for HB 1322.

Oftentimes, the average caseload of a School Counselor who works in public schools in Maryland are astronomically higher than other jurisdictions. Having to provide emotional support for each student every day is a very difficult, highly stressful responsibility. I believe that those who provide School-Based Behavioral Health Services can take on providing much more emotional support to more of our students, regardless of if they are non-IEP students or IEP students. In my tenure, I have personally seen mental health providers in schools I have worked in refuse to support non-IEP students. I recently had a student who was in an emotional crisis not be seen by a mental health provider because she does not have “the right insurance.”

Members of the committee, too many students are suffering emotionally every day because they feel as if they have no one to turn to. I often hear students say, “My counselor is too busy to see me.” In some instances, it is true, mostly because of our very large caseloads. It does not mean we do not want to see and support these students. It is a matter that we can not at any given point in time address every single students’ concerns. We need so much help and support from our fellow colleagues/mental health colleagues. This legislation will offer the opportunity for more students to receive crucial services, which in turn can help students become the very best student versions of themselves. Please vote for the sanctity of our students in the state of Maryland.

Again I ask for a favorable report on SB 201. Thank you.