



A Union of Professionals
AFT-Maryland

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**Written Testimony Submitted to the
Maryland House Health and Government Operations Committee
HB 82
Maryland Medical Assistance and Children's Health Insurance Programs –
School-Based Behavioral Health Services – Reimbursement
February 14, 2023
SUPPORT**

Good afternoon, Chair Peña-Melnyk and members of the Health and Government Operations Committee. My name is LaBrina Hopkins and I am a certified public school special educator. I have served as a Self-Contained Special Education Teacher, Resource Teacher, and an IEP Chair during my 22 years with Baltimore City Public Schools. I am also the Secretary/Treasurer of AFT-Maryland and a member of the Baltimore Teachers Union, AFT Local 340. As an educator, I ask this committee for a favorable report for HB 82.

As a Special Educator and IEP Chair, I have in the past been tasked with teaching students with special needs, providing accommodation and modifications so that these students could access the curriculum, developing IEP goals and objectives, facilitating IEP meetings, and coordinating Related Service Providers to ensure that students were receiving IEP required services. As an IEP Chair I was also responsible for Initial IEP referrals. Many of these referrals came from parents and teachers of students that experienced trauma and/or were exhibiting some behavioral or mental health concerns. In many of those instances, students did not meet the criteria as a student with an educational disability and therefore did not qualify for an IEP. I am here to advocate for those children. The children that have mental health needs but do not have an IEP.

There are so many children in our schools that need services from a qualified mental health professional during the school day. Schools are currently overwhelmed with the number of students that have required mental health services through an IEP. Districts are able to bill Medical Assistance for these students. Much of these funds go to staffing the Related Services Providers. However, Districts are not able to bill for services for students that do not have an IEP. If Districts were able to bill for students without IEPs, they would have access to federal revenue streams that would allow them to be able to hire additional mental health providers to render these services.

Members of the committee, this bill is necessary because it would require the Department of Mental Health to apply for federal reimbursement to help students who truly need these services. Every student in the state has a constitutional right to a high-quality educational program, and as it stands right now, Maryland is leaving money on the table in the form of

federal dollars that are meant for students with special needs. Again, I call for a favorable report to HB 82. Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'LaBrina K. Hopkins', written in a cursive style.

LaBrina K. Hopkins
Secretary Treasurer
AFT- Maryland