

HB1234_MSEA_Bost_FAV.pdf

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Position: FAV

**Testimony in Support of House Bill 1234
Workgroup to Study the Wages of Education Support Professionals**

**House Ways and Means Committee
March 14, 2023**

**Cheryl Bost
President**

The Maryland State Education Association supports House Bill 1234. House Bill 1234 establishes a workgroup to study the wages of education support professionals (ESPs) across Maryland to determine what percentage of ESPs earn a living wage. The workgroup would also be tasked with studying an increase in the wages of ESPs in order to attract and retain skilled workers. The workgroup would submit its final report with its findings and recommendations to the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee, the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee, the House Appropriations Committee, and the House Ways and Means Committee. Members of the workgroup would include essential stakeholders, including representatives of ESPs labor unions, to conduct this critical study.

MSEA represents 75,000 educators and school employees who work in Maryland's public schools, teaching and preparing our almost 900,000 students so they can pursue their dreams. MSEA also represents 39 local affiliates in every county across the state of Maryland, and our parent affiliate is the 3-million-member National Education Association (NEA).

ESPs are crucial for a well-functioning and healthy school environment. ESPs provide a wide variety of necessary skills and services for students and educators, including food service for students, making certain students arrive and leave school safely, providing instructional and behavioral support to students in general and special education classrooms, conducting administrative and clerical work in the front office, and connecting students with the additional supports they need. In short, ESPs make



it possible for schools to run; without them, students and educators would not have the support they need to learn in school or thrive in the workplace.

Unfortunately, schools are facing critical staffing shortages in both ESP positions and educator positions. From October 2019 through October 2021, employment levels for essential ESP positions, such as bus drivers, custodians, and teaching assistants decreased across the country by 14.7%, 6.0%, and 2.6%, respectively.¹ Staffing shortages have persisted into the 2022-2023 school year. A majority, and in most instances an overwhelming majority, of public schools across the country are reporting difficulties with filling vacancies in ESP positions such as, administrative staff, transportation staff, custodial staff, and technology specialists.²

Maryland has the opportunity to stem the tide of ESP staffing shortages and make certain that schools are fully staffed to support students and educators. House Bill 1234 will allow an inclusive stakeholder group to study in depth the salary conditions of ESPs and make recommendations to retain and recruit more individuals to become ESPs in Maryland's public schools.

We urge the committee to issue a Favorable Report on House Bill 1234.

¹ David Cooper and Sebastian Martinez Hickey, Economic Policy Institute, *Raising pay in public K-12 schools is critical to solving staffing shortages*, p. 6 (Feb. 3, 2022), <https://files.epi.org/uploads/244445.pdf>.

² Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, *School Pulse Panel*, (select "staffing" tab), (Data collected June 2022 and August 2022), <https://ies.ed.gov/schoolsurvey/spp/>.

HB1234_MSEA_C. Porter_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Cindy Porter

Position: FAV

Testimony in Support of House Bill 1234
Workgroup to Study the Wages of Education Support Professionals
House Ways and Means Committee
March 14, 2023
1:00 PM

Cindy Porter
Carroll Association of School Employees

Good afternoon, Chair Atterbeary and Honorable Members of the Ways and Means Committee. My name is Cindy Porter, and I am a veteran Education Support Professional, currently in my twenty-fourth year working as a Special Education Paraprofessional in the Carroll County Public School System. I am here today to provide testimony in support of HB1234, a bill which would establish a workgroup to study the wages of Education Support Professionals and find a long-term solution to attract and retain skilled workers in professions that continue to gain foundational importance in the education of students across our state.

Personally, what began over twenty-three years ago for me as an Instructional Assistant, has exponentially expanded into a career requiring extensive background knowledge in educational curriculum, interventions, and most importantly, student emotional, behavioral, and mental health. At one time during my career, I worked two jobs for just under fourteen years, and three jobs for just under twelve years. During this time, I was also a mother of three who volunteered for extra-curricular parent groups and attended college when I could, finally earning my associate degree after eighteen years in 2019.

You might wonder why I speak about “My Story”. At the age of sixty-two, with over twenty-three years in my profession and two years credit given for my military service, I earn just over \$35,000 per year and am not able to live even modestly on my own. Please know that figure also includes wages earned working summer programs and some paid after-school opportunities.

For the past eighteen months, I have had the privilege to speak to other Education Support Professionals across our state because of my work with the Maryland State Education Association. These professionals feed our students, open, close, and maintain our schools, enroll students, handle school finances and administrative paperwork, greet the public and handle family and student concerns, maintain the technology which our students now utilize every day, transport students in buses twice a day, develop crucial relationships with these students who require more emotional, behavioral and academic support than ever before, and unfortunately, sometimes sustain injury because of some of those student behaviors. Many are working more than one job, and some are choosing between necessities for their families. Their

hearts are big. Their desire to help our students succeed is even bigger. But the earnings of many support professionals are not reflective of the essential nature of their positions.

The workgroup that would be created by the passage of this bill would provide an opportunity to gain a better understanding of the support professionals who dedicate themselves to the students of our state and find meaningful solutions to retain and continue to recruit highly qualified applicants for these essential school system positions. With that in mind, I respectfully ask the committee to vote in favor of HB1234.

HB1234-FAV-AFSCME-ESP Study.pdf

Uploaded by: Cindy Smalls

Position: FAV



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HB1234 Workgroup to Study the Wages of Education Support Professional
Budget & Taxation Committee
March 14th, 2023

Favorable

AFSCME representing support staff in Baltimore City, Prince George’s, Anne Arundel, Baltimore Charles, Hartford, and Carroll counties support HB 1234. This bill establishes the Workgroup to Study the Wages of Education Support Professionals staffed by the Maryland State Department of Education. In determining what percentage of Education Support Professional earn a living wage in the State and to study increasing the wages of ESPs to attract and retain skilled workers, the workgroup must consider specified matters.

School support staff play an important role in ensuring students are learning in a safe and supportive learning environment. Our AFSCME members are in transportation, food service, health services, paraprofessionals, security, and maintenance within Maryland Public school Employees. School support staff can foster positive, trusting relationships with students and improve school climate by encouraging parent and family involvement in their students’ education. School support staff can go beyond the curriculum by providing youth development resources for families and teachers that address trauma-informed practices and positive behavioral interventions. Because students connect with school support staff on many occasions throughout the school day, support staff can model positive behavior and send positive messages to students as well.

Staffing shortage continues to be an issue within our schools and our support staff are being asked to do more with less and without the resources they need and the without the compensation that they deserve. The workload, low morale, and stress issues is what causes burnout and many to leave the school system. That’s why HB 1234 is so important, and this study is needed to begin to address the resources our support staff need in our public schools. While we are thankful for the Blueprint for Maryland Future provides support to our schools and some ESP positions, we can do more.

Children need to be in a safe and healthy environment to flourish. There are many people who work together to make this happen, great teachers combined with great support staff. Let’s give our support staff the resources they need and respect that they deserve.

For these reasons AFSCME ask for a favorable report on HB1234.

HB 1234 Workgroup to Study the Wages of Education

Uploaded by: Denise Riley

Position: FAV



A Union of Professionals
AFT-Maryland

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Kenya Campbell
PRESIDENT

LaBrina Hopkins
SECRETARY-TREASURER

**Written testimony submitted to the Maryland House Ways and Means Committee
HB 1234 - Workgroup to Study the Wages of Education Support Professionals
March 14, 2023**

SUPPORT

Chair Atterbeary and members of the committee, on behalf of the 20,000 members of the American Federation of Teachers – Maryland (AFT-MD), including the Baltimore Teachers Union (BTU), we ask for a favorable report on HB 1234 - Workgroup to Study the Wages of Education Support Professionals.

This bill establishes a workgroup to study the wages of education support professionals (ESP) including bus drivers, cafeteria workers, office employees, and other positions that are vital to the education of Maryland's students.

The workgroup will determine the percentage of education support professionals in Maryland – who earn a living wage. In addition, to study whether increased wages may to attract and retain workers in ESP positions. This information will be provided to the General Assembly to inform what actions may be taken to improve conditions to

Since the pandemic, it has been difficult to recruit and retain people for ESP positions. Staff shortages are reported in school districts across Maryland. ESP provide essential services to our students including transportation, meals, classroom support, technical support, clean and safe classrooms, and other services that contribute to a positive learning environment.

School support staff are essential to the function of the education system. Teachers and students depend on them for their work and commitment. For too long, their work has been taken for granted. It is time they get the recognition they deserve including whether they have fair compensation. For these reasons, we ask for a favorable report on HB 1234. Thank you.

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HB 1234 - Workgroup to Study the Wages of Educatio

Uploaded by: Donna Edwards

Position: FAV



MARYLAND STATE & D.C. AFL-CIO

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HB 1234 - Workgroup to Study the Wages of Education Support Professionals House Ways and Means Committee March 14, 2023

SUPPORT

**Donna S. Edwards
President**

Maryland State and DC AFL-CIO

Madame Chair and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 1234. My name is Donna S. Edwards, and I am the President of the Maryland State and District of Columbia AFL-CIO. On behalf of Maryland's 300,000 union members, I offer the following comments.

Maryland has over 56,000 education support professionals but they are left behind in statewide discussions about school staffing shortages.¹ The term education support professional includes our paraeducators, clerical workers, custodial staff, food service workers, and more who all provide valuable services to our students and make our public education system possible. Despite their importance to our schools, these workers are underpaid with the average education support professional making just \$40,523 per year for full time work. Nearly 50% make less than \$35,000 per year.

Last year's FY2023 budget included \$8 million for local education agencies to issue bonuses to their education support professionals, but bonuses will not fix systemic underpayment. We support HB 1234's approach to ensuring that labor unions are fully involved in the process of discussing issues that impact their members.

We urge the committee to issue a favorable report for HB 1234.

¹ National Education Association, "Education Support Professional Earnings Report." NEA Research, April 2022.

MANSEF Testimony Support HB 1234 - March 2023.pdf

Uploaded by: Dorie Flynn

Position: FAV



**SUPPORT
House Bill 1234:**

Workgroup to Study the Wages of Education Support Professionals

OFFERED ON BEHALF OF

The Maryland Association of Nonpublic Special Education Facilities
(MANSEF)

BEFORE THE HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS

March 14, 2023

The Maryland Association of Nonpublic Special Education Facilities (MANSEF) offers this testimony in SUPPORT of HB 1234 and respectfully requests membership on this very important workgroup. We offer this testimony on behalf of the 70 nonpublic special education schools across Maryland currently serving approximately 3500 publicly funded school children with special needs. Our member schools employ over 1500 teachers, clinicians, and administrators.

HB 1234 proposes to create a workgroup to study the wages, provide guidance on issues such as working conditions, recruitment, and retention of Education Support Professionals (ESPs.) Our member schools could not function without the critical support of our ESPs. They are vital and valued members of the daily lives of our students.

Retaining skilled ESPs continues to be a challenge and we cannot keep pace to competitively compensate these very hard-working individuals. After gaining valuable experience working in our special placement schools, these dedicated support professionals often leave for better paying positions elsewhere. The upheaval of the pandemic created a further divide and hardship for so many in the special needs community and it was the ESPs who stepped up to help with the many technology issues, sanitizing of buildings and mental health support so desperately needed for our students.

While the Blueprint for Maryland's Future Act (HB1300 of 2020) which has now been enacted, provides that public school teacher salaries will increase dramatically over the next few years; it does not adequately address the needs of ESPs and those working in the special schools.

The special education placement schools are crucial to the fulfillment of IDEA, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. IDEA which mandates a "continuum of alternative placements to meet the needs of children with disabilities for special education and related services." Our

special education schools are one component in that continuum and fulfill a unique and essential role in meeting students' particular educational needs and serve an important role for Maryland to comply with the federal law regarding education for special needs students.

The MANSEF schools are uniquely equipped to provide the specific, multidisciplinary, frequently intensive resources students with special needs require. Therefore, the ESPs play a direct role in the very specialized, integrated programming that goes beyond academic education and encompasses the social and emotional well-being of each student.

Our education support professionals employed in the MANSEF schools are to be recognized and appreciated. It is for these reasons that MANSEF respectfully requests a favorable report on HB1234, and we look forward to participating in the workgroup.

Dorie Flynn
Executive Director
MANSEF
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Erin Shaw BTU Testimony - Bill #HB1234 (SB0735).pd

Uploaded by: Erin Shaw

Position: FAV

Workgroup to Study the Wages of Education Support Professionals / BILL
#HB1234/#SB735

Official Testimony; Position: **FAVORABLE**

To the Ways and Means and Appropriations Committees:

My name is Erin Shaw and I am a Staff Specialist in the District Office of the Baltimore City Public School System who works closely with ESPs, and I am a member of our unions' PRSP Chapter. I support the Workgroup to Study the Wages of Education Support Professionals / BILL #HB1234/#SB735.

It has become apparent to me over the short two years I have been at BCPS the incredible breadth of skills and responsibilities that are on the plates of ESPs in our District. The wages they are paid are absolutely inequitable and insufficient. As part of my role, I help to organize PD for School Secretaries and Office Assistants. I have spent many hours with them in the front offices of schools helping, observing, and talking to them about their experiences. These professionals manage payroll, enrollment, transportation, records, immunizations, and more – while answering phone calls from stakeholders, receiving students and parents, managing email communications, answering to principals, and receiving the wide range of people coming through the door. The amount of technical, organizational, and interpersonal skills that these roles require is stunning—and the stress levels and workloads are high. These individuals are the heart of the school, and are depended on by so many.

Education Support Professionals are just that—*professionals*—and they deserve professional wages. I strongly urge this committee to issue a favorable decision to create a Workgroup to Study the Wages of Education Support Professionals.

Respectfully,

Erin Shaw
Staff Specialist, System Learning & Development
Baltimore City Public Schools
emshaw@bcps.k12.md.us

HB 1234.Education Support Professionals Wage Study

Uploaded by: John Woolums

Position: FAV

BILL: House Bill 1234
TITLE: Workgroup to Study the Wages of Education Support Professionals
DATE: March 14, 2023
POSITION: SUPPORT
COMMITTEE: Ways and Means and Appropriations
CONTACT: John R. Woolums, Esq.

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) supports House Bill 1234 to establish the Workgroup to Study the Wages of Education Support Professionals to study and make recommendations regarding the adequacy of wages of education support professionals. MABE agrees that such a study is needed to analyze and explain the policies and funding decisions available to the Governor and legislature to enhance school systems' abilities to recruit, competitively compensate, and retain these essential support personnel in every school system across the state.

MABE supported similar legislation in 2022. However, Senate Bill 831 (Ch. 532) was enacted to invest in bonuses for education support staff but amended to remove the provisions establishing the wage study workgroup. Again, MABE is supporting House Bill 1234 in recognition of the value of the many and varied roles of school system support staff who contribute so significantly to the operations of school facilities, transportation, and other services as well as to the teaching and learning of students.

Education support professionals include a broad range of noncertificated staff members, including: teachers' aides and paraeducators, administrative assistants, custodians, bus drivers, facilities maintenance staff, security and technology staff, food service workers, and many other critically important school employees. The Blueprint for Maryland's Future ensures new statewide systems of compensation, working conditions, and professional development for certain educational staff, and increases per pupil funding to support these initiatives.

MABE supports actions by the General Assembly to provide sufficient state funding to compensate all educators and educational support professionals in line with the initiatives contained with the Blueprint. Again, local boards recognize that these professionals are essential to achieving the goals outlined by the Blueprint and successful day-to-day operations of 1,400 school serving nearly 900,000 students every school day.

For these reasons, MABE requests a favorable report on House Bill 1234.

K.G. HB 1234 Workgroup to Study the Wages of Educa

Uploaded by: Keysha Goodwin

Position: FAV

Testimony in Support of House Bill 1234

Workgroup to Study the Wages of Education Support Professionals

Ways and Means Committee

March 14, 2023

1:00pm

Good afternoon Ways and Means Committee,

My name is Keysha Goodwin, I am a ParaEducator of 18 yrs for BCPSS on external assignment as part of the Baltimore Teachers Union Paraprofessional and School Related Personnel Member Engagement Team (BTU PSRP Member Engagement Team). Today, I am testifying to provide insight on the hardship I face due to inadequate wages I receive for my skills and hard work. I was compelled to participate in this hearing because I want everyone that has a vote to understand why this bill is necessary.

Like many of my colleagues, I have done the right things: graduated from high school, obtained an undergraduate degree, and even went to graduate school. Next, I decided to work for a system that prepared me to have the education that would allow me to earn a living wage, the public school system. Unfortunately, public school systems in Maryland do not pay their educational support professionals a living wage.

As a PRSP, I work a full school day, an after school program, and a side hustle to make ends meet. This leaves me with little to no energy or time to fully participate in family, friends, and community functions. I desire to travel, to contribute financially to family and friends weddings, to donate to my community, and even donate to political campaigns but I cannot. I have a child in college. I need my son to be able to only focus on academics-extracurricular activities-volunteering-networking- internships while in college but he cannot. Instead he has to worry about whether he should work a part time job because I cannot afford to fully support his college education. Is it fair that he has to have a school loan, bill balance, and still worry about taking on part time work because my career as a PSRP doest afford me a basic living wage?

After 18 years, I still have a passion for working with children. Yet, this passion and the high demands of my professional field of choice has left me to live in a mixed but mostly low socioeconomic status community. Am I not worthy of the American Dream? I am asking you to vote in favor of HB 1234. Thank you for bringing this bill to the committee floor.

Sincerely,

Keysha Goodwin

BTU PSRP Member Engagement

kgoodwin@baltu.org

443-799-1712

Michael Kranick BTU Testimony - Bill #HB1234 (SB07)

Uploaded by: Michael Kranick

Position: FAV

Workgroup to Study the Wages of Education Support Professionals / BILL
#HB1234/#SB735

Official Testimony; Position: **FAVORABLE**

To the Ways and Means and Appropriations Committees:

My name is Michael Kranick, and I'm a Baltimore resident, a Baltimore City Public Schools System Special Educator of Secondary ELA, and a proud member of the Baltimore Teachers Union. I support the Workgroup to Study the Wages of Education Support Professionals / BILL #HB1234/#SB735.

The results of the bill's study will finally bring light to the wage-inequities disproportionately affecting ESPs, or otherwise known in my district, PSRPs: Paraprofessionals and Paraeducators. PSRPs are the lifeblood of the school, and I will do my best to encapsulate the immeasurable & invaluable support, wisdom, and experience I have received while working with one paraeducator in particular: Mr. Lymon. Mr. Lymon was the most respected, dedicated, and beloved member of my school. He went above and beyond for anyone and everyone every single day no matter what was going on in his life or anyone else's. The man's patience, consistency, flexibility, and warmth radiated throughout the building as students and staff interacted with him. Whenever I was with Mr. Lymon, I knew everything was going to be just fine.

I began my teaching career in Baltimore City at my current (and only) school six years ago, and I was fortunate enough to have been paired with Mr. Lymon on my first day to teach Middle School ELA. Throughout the years, we continued to learn from each other, support each other, and became one of the best teaching teams at our school. When I transitioned from middle school to high school ELA, Lymon was right there with me as my rock and my teaching partner. Between watching our 8th graders from my first year of teaching to winning our school's Teacher and Para of the Year awards in the same year, we got to see the fruits of our labor and did not have to visualize our impact or efforts. We always joked that if the school closed or the district moved one of us, the other would follow because we were that good.

Unfortunately, this year, due to personal financial constraints and hardships, Mr. Lymon had to make a choice in order to provide for his family: a.) continue working within the position he had held for over a decade, the partnership we had over the past six years, and the students & staff he loved so much with no advancement in sight toward a living wage and risk financial ruin, or b.) explore other career opportunities that would provide a living wage. In the end, Mr. Lymon chose the latter because he had no other choice.

I believe that passing of this bill is essential because I know there are many other Lymon's in the ESP role who may have to face the nearly impossible choice between financial security and stability, or ruin. No one should have to live paycheck without being able to create a meager savings because of an unlivable wage, especially not the most effective ESP I have had the invaluable privilege of calling my colleague and my friend. I respectfully urge this

committee to issue a favorable decision to create a Workgroup to Study the Wages of Education Support Professionals so that no ESP will have to choose between the work they love and the work they need to survive.

Sincerely,

Michael Kranick

Special Educator - Secondary ELA, Baltimore City Public Schools System

Member of the Baltimore Teachers Union

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Sally Murek testimony HB1234 ESP Wage Study Workgr

Uploaded by: Sally Murek

Position: FAV

Speaker: Sally Murek, Montgomery County Public Schools, Coordinator, Paraeducator Program

Occasion: Testimony for Workgroup to Study the Wages of Education Support Professionals – HB1234

Location: House Ways and Means, Appropriations

Date: Tuesday, March 14, 2023

Who: SEIU Local 500, VP Paraeducator chapter

Good afternoon, committee members, and thank you for this opportunity to be with you today to share my strong support for House Bill 1234. My name is Sally Murek. I am a paraeducator and the Coordinator of the Paraeducator Program with Montgomery County Public Schools where I have worked to support staff, and the instruction of students for 32 years. I want to say a special thank you to Delegate Wells for her leadership on this important issue.

Much has been shared with you in previous testimonies of how the heroes of the school system stepped up during the pandemic to ensure instruction continued for our students, our children. I wish to expand on the courage, flexibility, and stamina of the paraeducators. They were called upon to pivot instantly into a digital instructional world. Alongside of teachers, they took multiple and daily just-in-time trainings to learn all the virtual platforms and tools that would be available and needed to deliver virtual instruction which was effective and engaging. On top of the hours of technological trainings, they had to establish their “home classrooms” and set up technology for virtual delivery while spending hours collaborating with their peers and teachers. And they had to form their own small groups of students with teacher guidance while figuring out how to continue to support the students they were already supporting. Many also had to supervise their own children through their digital learning classes and being at home rather than in school or child care. Paraeducators had to handle the trauma and anxiety of the pandemic for themselves, their families, and their loved ones while carrying on with their prescribed task of engaging our students in effective differentiated instruction.

Educational support professionals, specifically paraeducators, were left out of the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future for them to be recognized and respected as the integral partners in student instruction and learning that they are. They were removed in the eleventh hour before passage of the bill, and I hope the workgroup being formed by this legislation will rectify that mistake. They serve as co-educators and are due the same respect and recognition.

Montgomery County Public Schools has approximately 2700 paraeducators. 60% have a four-year degree, another 20% have master’s degrees and we have a number that hold Ph.Ds. Our paras have CHOSEN this as their career, not because it is “all they can do.” They love supporting the academics and growth of our students. They are flexible and willing to use their instructional knowledge and skills to quickly support school operations and instructional needs in real time as situations arise. During COVID, and continuing through our current school year, many, many paras have stepped in to be teachers covering classes for a day, a week, and even as long-term subs because of high staff absenteeism and unfilled teacher positions.

Paras build relationships to develop and promote the whole-child. It is not uncommon for students to have deeper relationships with paras, or other educational support professionals, rather than with their teacher. Paras are quick to pick up on subtle changes in a child's behavior in unstructured settings such as specials, and lunch and recess. They may see a gregarious child become quiet and withdrawn at recess, or a child who usually brings lunch to school to suddenly not bringing lunch and not wanting the "free" lunch that is offered. These social-emotional observations are then shared with teachers and counselors as possible "red flags." They also provide continuity to families by being there for siblings and cousins as they progress through a school.

Paraeducators love working in schools and supporting the academic and well-being development of our students, but they have financial needs and families, too. Low wages are affecting our recruitment and retention of these valuable and educated employees. Many must work second jobs and struggle to provide for their families, buy homes, and provide for their futures. We have heard terrible stories of paras being homeless and living out of their cars even though they are fully employed by our schools. Many cannot afford to live in the county where they work. More than half of all support staff working full time in 2021-2022 earned less than \$35,000. 70% were paid less than \$45,000. They are "essential" but are not paid as if they are. Paras, and educational support professionals, are the backbone of our schools. They deserve a fair wage and recognition for the value they bring to education.

In closing, I ask for your support to pass House Bill 1234. Our schools are worth it – our educational support staff are worth it – our children are worth it.

Shari Brown Testimony of HB 1234 (1).pdf

Uploaded by: Shari Brown

Position: FAV

Testimony in Support of House Bill 1234

Workgroup to Study the Wages of Education Support Professionals

Ways and Means Committee

March 14, 2023

1:00pm

My name is Shari Brown and I am on an external assignment with the Baltimore Teachers Union as a PSRP (Paraprofessional and School Related Personnel) Member Engagement Team Associate. My prior assignment was that of a school secretary in many schools throughout the district to include elementary, middle and high schools.

House Bill 1234 is very important to Paraprofessionals (ESPs) in Education. Currently the study of earning wages that currently exist for paraprofessionals are that of a subsistence wage and the living wage. A subsistence wage allows employees to pay for basic needs but leaves no extra income. An employee earning a subsistence wage is usually living paycheck to paycheck. A living wage allows an employee to earn enough income for a satisfactory standard of living and to provide expendable income which prevents an employee from falling into poverty.

Members of the Baltimore Teachers Union have shared with the union that they are not making enough money to pay their monthly expenses and are forced to seek extra incomes by working a second and sometimes third job to afford emergency expenses like a surprise medical bill or a car repair. Many of these members are our Paraprofessionals, known also as PSRPs or ESPs. PSRPs are not only the most underpaid of all job classifications in the district but are the most overworked. PSRPs are expected to be flexible and fill in the many gaps that exist at a school. We take on the jobs that no one else is willing or able to do and still support teachers, students, families, communities, stakeholders and the district. When all personnel were allowed to stay virtual during the pandemic, it was school secretaries and custodial staff not allowed that option. We were on the front lines transitioning schools from virtual to hybrid after the pandemic.

The work of PSRPs is essential to ensuring that school districts across the state meet the requirements to qualify for federal and state funded dollars, yet many PSRPs are dependent on federal and state assistance just to survive. No one should have to work multiple jobs to support themselves and their families. Regardless of education, experience and years of service, no job, especially in a school district, should value our time and our labor so low - that there are not enough hours in a week to earn a basic living. No one should have to work multiple jobs to support themselves and their families. PSRPs are held to high expectations just like all job classifications in school districts.

As a secretary, school safety was always a priority of staff, students and visitors. I was the first person they interacted with and the last person they saw when leaving. Yet I was the lowest

paid staff member at my school. They say secretaries are the ***Heart of the School***, yet we are the last heartbeat of concern when it comes to safety and compensation. We deserve so much more. By passing House Bill 1234, legislators can make a powerful statement that we are not just the “heart of the schools” but that our hearts truly matter.

HB 1234 provides a much needed study to ensure that Educational Support Professionals across Maryland are paid adequately for the work we do and that we can stay in our professions and continue to serve our students, our communities and our school staff. It sheds light on how our low wages can't keep up with inflation and how this affects education support professionals in Baltimore and throughout the state. This is why the study called for in HB1234 is so important.

I strongly urge a favorable report on House Bill 1234.

HB1234 The Heart and Pulse of a School.pdf

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Position: FAV

Tamika Peters
The Heart and Pulse of a School
Testimony in favor of HB 1234 - Workgroup to Study the Wages of Education
Support Professionals
Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
Tuesday March 14, 2023

Good afternoon, my name is Tamika Peters and I am a Staff Associate at Liberty Elementary School in Baltimore Maryland. In my role I support students and develop educators to reach awesome heights every day. I am currently in the Paraprofessionals and School Related Personnel Chapter of the Baltimore Teachers Union. I am writing in support of HB 1234 Workgroup to Study the Wages of Education Support Professionals.

Support Staff and Personnel are the heart and pulse of all educational systems. They are usually the first ones to arrive and the last to leave. In many districts, they are deemed essential as employees and in the need of supporting the staff and students in our school buildings. With all of that, the majority of support staff in Maryland school districts are not making a living wage. A living wage is defined as the minimum income necessary for a worker to meet their basic needs. Many support personnel do not make the minimum income to maintain a decent lifestyle of necessities. Due to this, they will work longer hours and/or work another job just to make his or her ends meet.

Support staff need to make a living wage. They need to be able to work on the level that they want and still be able to enjoy life. They do not need the fear of something in life happening that will put an extra strain on their already tight budget. Many support staff are just one paycheck or even one situation like car repairs, medical emergency etc away from falling even more behind in bills and maintaining the household. Once you add a family and regular living expenses, the majority of support staff are stressed. Any person that works in the school system, does it because they love what they do. They love their community and the people that they serve. Working in education is one of the most rewarding professions but also one of the the most underfunded , unappreciated and underpaid in the city, state and country. Increasing the living wage in Maryland will not only help with retention of these very important people in the school system, but also give a needed strength to the people we need to consider the heart and pulse of a school. For these reasons and more, I urge the committee to adopt a favorable report on HB 1234.