

## March 29th, 2023 - Alexander Allin: Support (FAV) for SB 482

Good afternoon, Chair Atterbeary and House Ways and Means Committee members. My name is Alexander Allin, and I am a sophomore from District 16 in Montgomery County and an executive board member for the Montgomery County Regional Student Government Association. In January, our over 100-student executive board recognized the importance of SB 482 and voted to support the bill through various advocacy efforts.

As an executive board member, I urge for the extension of the Janet L. Hoffman Loan Assistance Repayment Program to include mental health professionals, the key supporters of student success and well-being. Mental health professionals can be school counselors, psychologists, social workers, or pupil personnel workers, but they all have one overall purpose: supporting students and families. However, when all these vital resources are stretched thin, students in need of support don't get the help they need.

School counselors, who focus on teaching students valuable coping skills and are a safe space for students to talk and work through issues, experience this problem. On average, in Maryland, school counselors have caseloads of 150 students higher than the recommended amount.<sup>1</sup> Without enough counselors in a school, students must wait to deal with their issues, which can lead to them developing unhealthy habits and turning to violence to deal with their problems. Furthermore, school counselors help create social-emotional learning lessons, a proactive approach to mental health, but with high caseloads, they can only be reactive in supporting students in crisis.

With psychologists, who play a vital role in providing students accommodations, this happens as well. School psychologists in Maryland take on over double their recommended caseload of 500 students.<sup>2</sup> When psychologists are overworked and forced to pick what they have

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<sup>1</sup> Data from <https://hopefulfutures.us/action-maryland/>

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time for, they have weaker connections with members of their school community and can't be involved in proactive mental health measures.

A recent study determined that 70-80% of youth receive mental health services at school, making investments in mental health professionals imperative.<sup>3</sup> Students who feel discussions about mental health aren't welcome at home usually turn to school resources and professionals for support. We need students to have easy access to support and safe spaces in their schools, and mental health professionals are crucial in achieving these goals.

For these reasons, a favorable report on SB 482 is essential in allowing students to succeed academically in Maryland. Thank you for your time and consideration.

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<sup>3</sup> Study:  
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3306214/#:~:text=One%20epidemiological%20study%20showed%20that,children%20and%20adolescents%20by%20offering>