

March 27, 2023

The Honorable Vanessa Atterbeary
Ways & Means Committee
Room 131 – House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Ben Barnes
Appropriations Committee
Room 121 – House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

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

Dear Chair Atterbeary, Chair Barnes, and Honorable Members of the Committees:

The Maryland Psychiatric Society (MPS) and the Washington Psychiatric Society (WPS) are state medical organizations whose physician members specialize in diagnosing, treating, and preventing mental illnesses, including substance use disorders. Formed more than sixty-five years ago to support the needs of psychiatrists and their patients, both organizations work to ensure available, accessible, and comprehensive quality mental health resources for all Maryland citizens; and strive through public education to dispel the stigma and discrimination of those suffering from a mental illness. As the district branches of the American Psychiatric Association covering the state of Maryland, MPS and WPS represent over 1000 psychiatrists and physicians currently in psychiatric training.

MPS/WPS support Senate Bill 482: Janet L. Hoffman Loan Assistance Repayment Program - Mental Health Professionals in Public Schools (SB 482). MPS/WPS would first like to note for the committees that the commitment to becoming a psychiatrist takes an extremely long time to obtain and that psychiatrists' training is capped due to a limited number of graduate medical education (GME) slots. In the end-of-year package this past year, Congress funded 200 new GME slots, with 100 being designated for psychiatry, but states will still need to invest in expanding residency and fellowships to meet their mental health needs. HB 482 is a meaningful step in that direction.

Several benefits of loan repayment exist for mental health professionals working in schools, including:

1. **Reducing financial stress:** Mental health professionals who work in schools often have significant student loan debt, which can cause financial stress and impact their mental health. Loan repayment can help to alleviate this stress, allowing them to focus on their work and provide the best care for their students.
2. **Retention of qualified professionals:** Loan repayment programs can be a powerful tool for attracting and retaining qualified mental health professionals in schools. Many mental health professionals are deterred from working in schools due to the low salaries and high cost of living. Loan repayment programs can make the job more financially feasible and increase the likelihood that they will stay in the position.
3. **Improved access to care:** Mental health professionals are crucial to providing students with access to mental health care in schools. Loan repayment programs can help ensure that

there are enough professionals to meet the demand for services, improving access to care for students who need it.

4. **Increased job satisfaction:** Knowing that their student loans are being paid off can increase job satisfaction for mental health professionals working in schools. This can improve morale and motivation, leading to better job performance and higher quality care for students.
5. **Professional growth:** Many loan repayment programs require mental health professionals to commit to working in a particular school or district for a set period of time. This can provide an opportunity for professionals to build relationships with students and colleagues, and to develop their skills and expertise in working with children and adolescents.

Overall, loan repayment programs like the one found in SB 482 can be a valuable tool for supporting the mental health workforce in schools and improving the quality of care for students. For those reasons, MPS/WPS ask this committee for a favorable report on SB 482. If you have any questions with regard to this testimony, please feel free to contact Thomas Tompsett Jr. at tommy.tompsett@mdlobbyist.com.

Respectfully submitted,
The Maryland Psychiatric Society and the Washington Psychiatric Society
Legislative Action Committee