



Board of Education of Howard County  
Testimony Submitted to the Maryland House of Delegates,  
Ways and Means Committee; Appropriations Committee  
March 29, 2023

Board of Education  
of Howard County

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**SB0482: FAVORABLE W/AMENDMENTS**

**Janet L. Hoffman Loan Assistance Repayment Program - Mental Health Professionals in Public Schools**

The Board of Education of Howard County (the Board) supports **SB0482 Janet L. Hoffman Loan Assistance Repayment Program - Mental Health Professionals in Public Schools** with amendments to expand the scope of application for loan assistance to maximize recruitment efforts.

SB0482 broadens an existing teacher loan assistance repayment program to mental health professionals. Mental health professionals under the bill include school psychologists, resource psychologists, psychologist coordinators, social workers, social worker supervisors, or mental health coordinators.

As a legislative platform, the Board supports legislation that creates incentives to assist school systems in attracting and retaining highly-qualified teachers, mental health professionals, related services providers, and support staff to ensure adequate delivery of education. In Maryland and nationwide, meeting the expanded role of the public school system to nurture the physical, social, and emotional needs of students, has been hampered by the limited availability of mental health professionals. Staff supports the intent of SB0482 to attract more individuals into the profession by lowering costly higher education bills.

To increase the potential for impact of SB0482, staff recommends the addition of school counselors and pupil personnel workers to the definition of mental health professionals able to take advantage of the loan assistance repayment program. The broad scope of the application of this bill to mental health professionals who receive a graduate, professional, or undergraduate degree from any accredited college or university – as opposed to the restriction for a teacher to graduate from a school in the state of Maryland – will further attract candidates from across the country.

Likewise, as mental health professionals are needed in all schools no matter their demographics, the difference in application of Free and Reduced Meals (FARMs) and Title I thresholds to receive the loan repayment as written in the bill is welcome. Mental health professionals must have been employed in a public school in the state for at least one year under the original bill to receive the benefit, presumably differing from the requirements for teachers to have taught in Maryland for at least two years to again address the critical shortage in this area as quickly as possible.

While the years of experience portion was amended by the Senate to mirror the two year teacher requirement, the Board recommends instead shifting back to the original

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one year for both teachers and mental health professionals, as well as expanding the teacher portion of this loan – to include more eligible schools in which teachers are needed and additional specialties such as special education teachers – which would go a long way in supporting overall staffing recruitment and retention efforts of local school systems.

With these amendments, we urge a FAVORABLE report of SB0482 from this Committee.