

BILL: Senate Bill 201
TITLE: Maryland Medical Assistance and Children's Health Insurance Programs - School-Based Behavioral Health Services - Reimbursement
DATE: February 7, 2023
POSITION: SUPPORT
COMMITTEE: Finance
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The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) supports Senate Bill 201 and the objective to secure already available federal funding to expand the availability of school-based mental health services and behavioral supports for students. The funding received following passage of this bill will contribute significantly to the services students receive and assist school systems in dedicating resources to the hiring of additional social workers, school psychologists, counselors, and other behavioral health specialists critically needed to provide these services.

Specifically, MABE strongly supports the bill's direction to the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) to apply to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services for a state plan amendment that authorizes Maryland to provide for reimbursement for medically necessary school-based behavioral health services provided to all individuals enrolled in the Maryland Medical Assistance Program or Children's Health Program. Importantly, the expansion of Medicaid reimbursement would apply to student services beyond those provided under an Individualized Educational Program (IEP) or Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP).

MABE's support for this bill is grounded in the association's advocacy for the essential staffing and resources necessary to meet the mental and behavioral health needs of our nearly 900,000 public school students. Senate Bill 201 is clear in directing the state to seek authorization for Medicaid reimbursement to the maximum extent permitted under federal and state law, and clearly defines services as reimbursable when provided by a school-based mental health provider working within their scope of practice, including: school counselors, school psychologists, school social workers, school nurses, and other behavioral health professionals and paraprofessionals certified by MSDE.

The benefits and value of access to high quality school-based mental and behavioral health services for students and families, teachers and staff, and communities at large can hardly be overstated. Prior to the pandemic, evidence was mounting that additional resources were needed to provide the holistic array of social, emotional, behavioral and academic supports for all students. Then the pandemic saw a dramatic rise in students reporting experiencing anxiety and depression and other symptoms. Today, students and staff are coping with these accumulated challenges in an environment of educator and other professional staffing shortages. Fortunately, Maryland is poised to address these needs through programs and initiatives such as the Maryland Consortium on Coordinated Community Supports, Local Management Boards, and the federal funding to support school-based mental and behavioral services to be expanded under Senate Bill 201.

For these reasons, MABE urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 201.