



# Sheppard Pratt

## Written Testimony

Senate Budget and Taxation Committee  
House Ways and Means Committee

### **SB311 / HB448 Nonpublic Education – Special Education Placements – Renaming and Teacher Salaries (Teacher Pay Parity Act)**

February 7, 2023

Position: SUPPORT

Sheppard Pratt thanks the Maryland General Assembly for your longstanding leadership and support of mental and behavioral health providers in Maryland. This testimony outlines the Sheppard Pratt **support of SB311 / HB448 Nonpublic Education - Special Education Placements – Renaming and Teacher Salaries (Teacher Pay Parity Act)**. It is our hope that the Maryland General Assembly vote a favorable report on this legislation.

Sheppard Pratt operates 12 nonpublic special education schools across the state of Maryland. We serve about 525 students across six different counties throughout the State. These comprise the most vulnerable and complex populations of students in the State including those diagnosed with Emotional Disabilities, AutismSpectrum Disorder, and Intellectual Disabilities. Many of the students served in Sheppard Pratt Schools also have co-occurring disorders. Therefore, these students have significant learning and behavioral needs. Due to their intense behavioral, therapeutic and educational challenges, these students' needs and the support they require to be successful in school supersede what can be provided in a public school setting. These students require specially designed instruction in highly specialized settings unique to nonpublic special education schools.

Sheppard Pratt Schools and other nonpublic schools in the State serve publicly funded students. Since the term, nonpublic, infers the opposite, the term special education placement, is a more appropriate name for this continuum of education and placement. The bill is suggesting a renaming of nonpublic schools to special education placement schools to provide greater clarity to the types of services provided and to whom they are provided.

To effectively meet the highly specialized needs of the students served in Sheppard Pratt Schools, we must have the capacity to employ highly qualified and experienced special and general education teachers. The current disparity between public and nonpublic teacher salaries does not allow for Sheppard Pratt to pay their special and general educators a salary that aligns with their public school counterparts.

Sheppard Pratt is the largest provider of nonpublic special education in the State of Maryland. We employ approximately 650 staff members. Currently, our special education and general education teachers are paid between 9 to 26 percent less than their public school counterparts with the gap widening as teachers become more credentialed and experienced. This pay gap is evidenced by our annual teacher turnover



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and vacant teacher positions. At Sheppard Pratt Schools, the annualized turnover rate was 45 percent of our teaching staff. We have continued to struggle to fill teacher vacancies frequently existing throughout the year.

Nonpublic schools are vital to the fulfillment of IDEA, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. IDEA mandates a “continuum of alternative placements to meet the needs of children with disabilities for special education and related services.” Our nonpublic 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.

Our nonpublic schools are uniquely equipped to provide the specific, multidisciplinary, frequently intensive resources students with special needs require. The scope and depth of staff expertise afford specialized, integrated programming that goes beyond academic education and encompass the social and emotional well-being of each student. In addition to the skilled, highly trained teachers, nonpublic schools are staffed to provide other critical services such as behavior programs, crisis management and medical attention.

If this bill passes, it will allow Sheppard Pratt Schools to pay their teachers a salary aligned to the public school system in which the school is located over a three-year phase in period. This bill will improve the retention and recruitment of teachers in all 12 of our nonpublic educational settings.

Consequently, Sheppard Pratt is concerned that if the bill were not to pass, teacher salary parity gaps will only worsen, and our schools will continue to experience a high turnover rate and continued challenges with recruitment and retention. Thus, threatening the education continuity of this already vulnerable population of students.

Sheppard Pratt urges you to vote a favorable report on **SB311 / HB448 Nonpublic Education – Special Education Placements – Renaming and Teacher Salaries (Teacher Pay Parity Act)**

### **About Sheppard Pratt**

Sheppard Pratt is the nation’s largest private, nonprofit provider of mental health, substance use, developmental disability, special education, and social services in the country. A nationwide resource, Sheppard Pratt provides services across a comprehensive continuum of care, spanning both hospital- and community-based resources. Since its founding in 1853, Sheppard Pratt has been innovating the field through research, best practice implementation, and a focus on improving the quality of mental health care on a global level. Sheppard Pratt has been consistently ranked as a top national psychiatric hospital by *U.S. News & World Report* for nearly 30 years.