

**Written Testimony Submitted to the Maryland House Appropriations Committee
HB 983 - State Personnel - Maryland Department of Health - Pay Rates
March 5, 2024**

SUPPORT

Good afternoon Chair Barnes and members of the Committee. AFT-MD supports HB 983, a bill to enhance the pay rate for teachers employed by the Maryland Department of Health in facilities serving a forensic population. The critical role these educators play in providing direct services to a unique and at-risk population demands our advocacy for their well-deserved compensation.

The facilities place teachers in direct service, exposing them to risks inherent in working with a forensic population. The need for a stable and qualified staff is paramount for the continuity of treatment, retention, and recruitment efforts. The proposed increase in compensation is a crucial step towards attracting and retaining highly qualified teachers, ultimately leading to improved services and better patient outcomes.

The nine educators targeted by this bill are professionals holding master's degrees and certifications, underscoring the expertise required for their roles. Despite their qualifications and the challenging nature of their work, these teachers currently receive compensation that lags behind their counterparts in city and county schools.

This bill rightly seeks to rectify this disparity by aligning the pay scale of teachers in state mental hospitals with other essential personnel, such as building security, nurses, and care assistants. All these professionals are united in the serious task of providing care for juvenile patients, whose mental and behavioral health complications may manifest in impulsive and assaultive behavior.

The challenges associated with delivering safe and stable care in a demanding environment underscore the critical importance of adequate compensation for these dedicated professionals. The proposed increase of two pay grades is a step towards addressing the persistent challenges in hiring and retaining a high-quality workforce necessary for serving a forensic population.

Again, we urge the committee to provide a favorable report for HB 983. Thank you.

