



SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 370

**Community Schools – Rental Assistance for Community School Families
Program and Fund - Establishment
Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
Wednesday, January 31, 2024
FAVORABLE**

Dear Chairman Guzzone and members of the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee,

The University of Maryland School of Social Work's **Center for Restorative Change and The Positive Schools Center (Initiatives at the University)** strongly supports SB370 which will establish a rental assistance program for eligible community school families to receive funding to support the cost of rental and utility payments, rental and utility arrears, and late fees associated with rental and utility payments from a designated funds for up to twelve months. SB370 also establishes the responsibility of the Community School Coordinator to administer funds to eligible families.

The Positive School Center's mission is to create positive, supportive, and mindful learning communities where students and school staff connect, develop, and grow. Under the Positive Schools Center umbrella are community schools. The community school strategy is implemented all through Maryland, with 155 community schools in the city. The role of the Community School Coordinator is essential in holistically addressing the whole child and family. Community School Coordinators are an integral piece in analyzing community needs and addressing the gaps within systems. Community School Coordinators have strong relationships with school staff, students, families, and community members. They are the key person in ensuring that every stakeholder is set up for success.

SB 370 will increase the capacity of Community Schools to holistically support the needs of its families by going beyond academic services to support general family wellbeing. Community schools take on a multidisciplinary approach when it comes to addressing the whole child. Every community school has a student wellness team composed of instructional and support staff, including the community school coordinator. These teams work directly with students and their families to get a full understanding of their specific needs and contexts. Unfortunately, many times, these teams discover that our students are going through situations that are out of our control - particularly when there is financial hardship. In fact, in 2022, approximately 4,300 students in Baltimore City alone were experiencing homelessness. A staggering 33% increase from the previous year. Funds like those established by SB 370 would create a sustainable and reliable way for schools to better support those families.



SB 370 will increase family and academic engagement and performance to ensure greater equity in outcomes for Maryland's students.

Parents are often unaware of the resources available within the state and community because they often worry about various barriers. Due to financial barriers, families are less likely to attend school events and conferences. In addressing housing within community schools, Community School Coordinators would be able to boost overall student and family attendance by eliminating the stress factor of rental payments for the family and establishing a safe, supported household. Events and conferences include family literacy nights, wellness workshops, school family council meetings, and parent teacher conferences. These meetings are crucial for parents to attend so that they can receive any necessary support and/or resources, as well as being present in their students' education; however, when they are facing crippling financial issues, they often have to prioritize those needs over attending school-based meetings.

SB 370 will address transportation, safety concerns, and relocations for students and families. When students and families are evicted and have to relocate, they no longer have the support needed to thrive. Students and families lose essential resources provided by the school such as mental health services, academic supports, and after school programming/extended care. All of these resources are essential in ensuring that the student's needs are being met. With the use of rental assistance of up to 12 months, a family is able to maintain housing stability and maintain supports in place, or provide the school with enough time to create a transition plan.

Each community school leverages unique community resources to meet community needs, and maintains a core focus on children, while recognizing that children grow up in families, and that children are integral parts of communities. This integrated approach with the addition of rental assistance in community schools, will lead to student success, strong families, and healthy communities. Thank you for taking the time to listen and address the much needed change needed in our school communities.

Sincerely,

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