

BILL: Senate Bill 441
TITLE: Janet L. Hoffman Loan Assistance Repayment Program - Nancy Grasmick
Public School Professional Award - Public School Nurses
DATE: February 14, 2024
POSITION: SUPPORT
COMMITTEE: Education, Energy, and the Environment
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The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) supports Senate Bill 441 in order to ensure that the scope of the Janet L. Hoffman Loan Assistance Repayment Program includes school nurses.

MABE greatly appreciates the focus of this legislation on expanding an existing state program to meaningfully enhance the availability of registered nurses to provide high quality health services to our students. Senate Bill 441 would contribute significantly toward the recruitment and education of much needed school nurses in schools across the state. MABE supports the role of the current Janet L. Hoffman Loan Assistance Repayment Program in providing financial assistance to teachers, including those teachers who work in a Federal Title I school or school identified for improvement by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE). In addition, other eligible professional employment fields include speech pathologists, social workers, and physical and occupational therapists. However, school nurses are not eligible for the Program. Therefore, MABE strongly supports the program expansion proposed by Senate Bill 441.

MABE's support for this bill is grounded in the association's advocacy for the essential staffing and resources necessary to meet the school health needs of our nearly 900,000 public school students. The benefits and value of access to high quality school-based health services for students and families, teachers and staff, and communities at large can hardly be overstated. For many years, evidence has been mounting that additional resources are needed to provide the holistic array of somatic and mental health services, and social, emotional, behavioral and academic supports for all students. Today, students and staff continue to cope with these accumulated challenges in an environment of educator and other professional staffing shortages, including shortages of registered nurses in schools.

Under current law and regulations, school health services must be overseen by a "designated school health services professional" and may be provided by a "school health services aide". The definition of "designated school health services professional" includes a physician, certified nurse practitioner, or registered nurse, with experience or special training both in working with children and families in community or school health programs and practices in accordance with the current medical and nursing standards of care" (COMAR 13A.05.05.06). Regarding the administration of medication, the regulations also ensure the direct supervision by health professionals, including registered nurses (COMAR 13A.15.11.04). In these ways, registered nurses are vital to the successful operation of school health services throughout Maryland.

For these reasons, MABE requests a favorable report on Senate Bill 441.