



HOWARD COUNTY OFFICE OF COUNTY EXECUTIVE

3430 Courthouse Drive ■ Ellicott City, Maryland 21043 ■ 410-313-2013 Voice/Relay

Calvin Ball
Howard County Executive
cball@howardcountymd.gov

www.howardcountymd.gov
FAX 410-313-3051

February 14, 2024

Senator Brian Feldman, Chair
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 West
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: **TESTIMONY OF SUPPORT**: SB 441: Janet L. Hoffman Loan Assistance Repayment Program - Nancy Grasmick Public School Professional Award - Public School Nurses

Dear Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Chang, and Members of the Committee,

I commend Senator Beidle for introducing Senate Bill 441 which would expand the Janet L. Hoffman Loan Assistance Repayment Program to include school nurses in our public schools. School nurses play a critical role in ensuring the health and well-being of the entire school community. During the COVID-19 pandemic after schools re-opened, nurses were on the frontlines of ensuring school safety and controlling the spread of the virus. Not only did they maintain their regular duties, but they also managed testing, administered vaccines, coordinated care and quarantining for students who tested positive. We are fortunate that within the Howard County Public School system (HCPSS), there are 85 nurses who cover 77 schools.

However, across the state, most schools do not have a dedicated nurse. Instead, there are cluster nurses that split their time serving multiple schools. Considering the growing shortage of healthcare workers across the country and across the state, any tool we can use to invest and incentivize healthcare workers is essential.

As County Executive and a former educator, I understand the power of education provides critical pathways to advancement. However, none of that would be possible without the hard work and dedication of our professional school staff who work to ensure bright futures for the next generation. Expanding the loan repayment program to school nurses serving our schools will help retain and attract our most talented experts while also acknowledging the critical role they play in students' overall health and well-being. We remain committed to strengthening community-based health resources and long-term investments in supporting the needs of our students, educators and staff in our schools. With 85 school nurses in Howard County Public School System, HB 545 will be a clear signal of support.

In FY24, I allocated \$1.5 million in funding for Howard County's Student Loan Assistance Repayment Program for Teachers for qualified educators who commit to teaching in the Howard County Public School System to help retain the highest quality teachers. This comes on top of our commitment of \$16 million in retention bonuses received by educators in recent years and a \$1.1 billion investment in the school systems FY24 budget.



HOWARD COUNTY OFFICE OF COUNTY EXECUTIVE

3430 Courthouse Drive ■ Ellicott City, Maryland 21043 ■ 410-313-2013 Voice/Relay

Calvin Ball
Howard County Executive
cball@howardcountymd.gov

www.howardcountymd.gov
FAX 410-313-3051

Now more than ever, it is critical to ensure access to health services for our students. In order to do this, we must commit to supporting the professionals who serve them and our communities. I welcome your support and urge a favorable report on SB 441.

All the Best,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Calvin Ball', is written over a thin blue horizontal line.

Calvin Ball, Howard County Executive