

## **SB 937 Grow Your Own Educators Grant Program – Favorable**

Good afternoon Senator Feldman and committee members,

I'm Sally Murek, the Paraeducator Program Manager for Montgomery County Public Schools and a vice-president representing paraeducators on the executive Board of **SEIU Local 500** which represents over 20,000 members serving Marylanders from cradle to career.

I'm here today to speak favorably in support of the passage of **SB 937, Grow Your Own Educators.**

Our schools are full of committed, skilled educational support professionals who desire to grow their careers and become certificated teachers, but obstacles remain.

As has often been shared, a paraeducator working 7 hours a day, 10 months a year is fortunate to earn about \$30,000 a year. Financially, pursuing a teacher certification is beyond the reach of many. Yet along with financial support, they also need social emotional support and mentorship. The educational support professional work force is more racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse than the current teacher cadre and many need "people" support along the way.

**SB 937** can help to overcome some of these barriers. It can provide not only the financial support needed to pursue higher education certification, but also the mentorship and personal support to earn certification.

Research indicates that education support professionals who attain teacher certification are more likely to:

- remain in the classroom than teachers prepared through other pathways,
- to reflect the racial and linguistic diversity of the students they serve,

- are more effective at improving student test scores in reading and math,
- are more likely to remain in teaching compared to teachers who did not have prior classroom experience.

Providing pathways to certification for interested education support professionals is a promising strategy toward a teaching workforce that better reflects the diversity of Maryland's students.

We must also remember that:

- All education support professional roles are critical to a school's success and daily functioning and should not be viewed as "stepping stones" to certificated roles. All education support professionals deserve a living wage regardless of their interest in becoming a teacher.
- Grow Your Own programs often require a commitment for participants to teach locally for a certain number of years upon graduation, though policies may also include caveats for those who are unable to complete the program or find a job.
- The development of diverse and highly qualified mentor teachers is an important element of successful Grow Your Own programs, and LEAs should consider how their Career Ladder can help develop mentor teachers to support GYO efforts.

**Thank you for the opportunity to speak in favor of SB 937 and I ask for your favorable consideration of this legislation.**