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Patrick Moran – President

HB1369 – Education – Minimum Wage for Education Support Professionals
Appropriations Committee
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FAVORABLE

AFSCME Council 3 supports House Bill 1369. House Bill 1369 seeks to attract more individuals into careers supporting our public schools and students by establishing a minimum \$25 per hour minimum wage for education support professionals (ESPs). The legislation would annually adjust the minimum wage for inflation.

AFSCME Council 3 represents approximately 50,000 public service workers at the state, county, and municipal levels of government. Our union is proud to represent dedicated ESPs in Allegany County Public Schools, Anne Arundel County Public Schools, Baltimore City Public Schools, Baltimore County Public Schools, Carroll County Public Schools, Charles County Public Schools, Harford County Public Schools, and Howard County Public Schools. ESPs are essential for the success of our public schools and students. Approximately 45,000 ESPs work across Maryland in a variety of crucial roles including food service, transportation, custodial services, transportation, individualized educational support, health services, school safety, building and grounds maintenance, and more. In short, without the labor of our dedicated school support staff, our schools could not function.

However, for far too long, ESPs have not received fair wages that support themselves and their families. In December 2024, the Maryland State Department of Education published a report on noncertificated education support professionals that included information and responses on pay data and their economic security.¹ The report found that the median salary for ESPs is approximately \$42,000 per year, however, this figure was skewed by the salary of technical personnel, which caused the median to be higher. The median salary for paraprofessionals was approximately \$34,000, and the report found that approximately 62% of ESPs make less than \$46,000, when technical personnel were excluded. A significant majority of ESPs (57.21%) have considered leaving their roles due to their current pay and benefits. Similarly, a majority of ESPs reported they cannot support themselves or their families on their current pay, could not handle a major unexpected expense, while at the same time are reporting increases in their workload due to existing vacancies or reductions in force. At the same time, the cost of living including housing, food, and utilities have risen dramatically further straining families budgets and their ability to stay afloat.

¹ Maryland State Department of Education, *Noncertificated Education Support Professionals* (December 2024), https://dlslibrary.state.md.us/publications/JCR/2024/2024_182.pdf

In recent years, the General Assembly recognized that teacher salaries had remained too low, were non-competitive, and needed to be raised in order to attract more individuals into the teaching profession. As part of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future, the General Assembly established a minimum starting pay rate for teachers of \$60,000 to be achieved by July 1, 2026, and established corresponding salary increases for progression along career ladders.

Similarly, starting pay must be increased to attract more individuals into ESP careers. Without a growing pipeline of dedicated ESPs, our public schools and our students will continue to deal with staffing vacancies that impact our public school services. Moreover, our public employers should act as model employers and provide a level of pay and benefits that afford dignity to the dedicated public employees that make public services possible for all Marylanders. We urge the General Assembly to take action to afford economic dignity to dedicated ESPs and help build tomorrow's pipeline.

We urge the committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 1369.

