



Delegate Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk
Delegate Bonnie Cullison
Health and Government Operations Committee
240 Taylor House Office Building
241 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Bill: House Bill 0672 School Health and Wellness Personnel Assessment and Maryland Council on Advancement of School-Based Health Centers

Position: Support with Amendment

Dear Chair Pena-Melnyk, Vince Chair Cullison, and Members of the Committee:

I am writing on behalf of the Maryland School Psychologists' Association (MSPA), which represents about 500 Maryland school psychologists. Through our work in schools, we promote the academic and social emotional development of Maryland students. We therefore submit this written testimony to support HB 0672 with an amendment.

School based mental health professionals occupy a central position in the continuum of community and school based services and supports envisioned by the [National Center for School Mental Health](#) at the University of Maryland. The Maryland General Assembly and Maryland state leaders have taken laudable steps in recent years to augment community-based mental health services available to students through the recently passed Blueprint and by utilizing funds from federal legislation enacted following the pandemic. Unfortunately however, those efforts did not include school based providers. As a result, the already existing shortage of school based mental health professionals like school psychologists remains unaddressed.

A specific scenario might help illustrate the potential impact of this shortage. The recently passed legislation directs funds towards community based providers offering teletherapy that students can attend in school. During therapy sessions, patients occasionally disclose plans for self-harm. While a therapist meeting in person with a student can ensure that student's safety following such a disclosure, a teletherapist requires the assistance of an individual who can physically check in with the student. Ideally, that person would be trained to de-escalate the student until he or she can be referred to appropriate care.

The above example is just one of the many ways school based mental health professionals integrate the care students receive from community based providers into academic settings. Other examples include informing students and families of the availability and existence of community based providers, helping implement interventions recommended by community based providers in academic settings such as classrooms and cafeterias, providing vital information about students' school functioning to help community based providers formulate intervention plans, and helping support the continued implementation of classroom and schoolwide prevention programs delivered by community based providers.

Because school psychologists have training in the assessment of and intervention for academic and mental health concerns as well as education law, they are well positioned to perform the above role. However, many schools do not have a school psychologist or other school based mental health professional present more than one or two days per week. Although the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) recommends a ratio of 1 school psychologist for every 500 students, at present there is 1 school psychologist for every 1053 Maryland students. In addition to falling short of NASP recommendations, Maryland also falls behind

the neighboring states of New Jersey (1:660), New York (1:545), New Hampshire (1:712), Massachusetts (1:662), and Connecticut (1:475), to name just a few examples¹.

As a result, MSPA strongly supports HB0672 because it establishes a program for gathering information about staffing levels of mental health professionals in schools. Because of school psychologists' unique training and central position in the continuum of student mental health supports, we also believe page 4 lines 15 - 18 should be amended to include a representative from the Maryland Association of School Psychologists amongst those consulted.

Thank you for taking the time to read this written testimony. If MSPA can provide any further information or be of any additional assistance, please do not hesitate to contact our legislative chair at legislative@mspaonline.org or our lobbyist Sarah Peters speters@hbstrategies.us or 410-322-2320.

Respectfully submitted,

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Co-Chair, Legislative Committee
Maryland School Psychologists' Association.

¹ Information retrieved from: <https://www.nasponline.org/about-school-psychology/state-shortages-data-dashboard>

