

**Committee:** House Ways and Means Committee

**Bill Number:** House Bill 551 - Primary and Secondary Education - Public School Employees - Salaries

**Hearing Date:** February 12, 2025

**Position:** Support

Dear Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and Members of the House Ways and Means Committee,

My name is Mrs Sue Young and I serve Belvedere Elementary in Anne Arundel County as their school counselor. I am writing in support of House Bill 551 regarding the recognition and inclusion of school counselors' who have attained National Board Certification in regards to salary. The Accountability Implementation Board (AIB) for MD Blueprint also acknowledges that the career ladder and inclusion for the associated salary enhancements covers school counselors. **This is needed to clarify and rectify inconsistencies that are currently occurring between various local counties. This is also needed to create a state-wide comprehensive and consistent strategy to recruit and retain highly qualified school counselors to serve in our Maryland public schools.** In addition to access to the career ladder, this also works to address shortages in our schools in a critical area of supporting student success.

Due to a critical shortage of school counselors, some elementary schools in our state have no school counselor to serve their students. **COMAR states that School Counselors spend 80% of their time directly with students. We work directly with ALL of the students in our building to eliminate barriers to learning and help students thrive.** Elementary school counselors serve students for 50% of their entire public school career. We do not have enough counselors to address caseloads that exceed ASCA's (American School Counselor Association) best practices of 250 students: 1 school counselor.

My current caseload is more than double that with 545 students :1 school counselor. The developmental levels I am currently serving in my school include ECI (3 year old special education students), preK, regional special education programs (ACC - alternative curriculum sites), and typically developing students from preK - 5th. **Your support for passing House Bill 551 would provide the resources needed to address recruitment, retention and caseloads to allow our Maryland students the best opportunity for overall school success. The issue is currently around implementation of this, the AIB and MSDE agree that school counselors should be included, however some counties are awaiting YOUR leadership at the State level to clarify this.**

School counselors are the ONLY mental health professionals who are eligible for NBCT. This is because school counselors are the ONLY mental health providers in our schools that provide mental health services to EVERY student in our buildings. We provide preventative services through classroom lessons and small group counseling. We also provide responsive services through individual and small group counseling. Both types of services are needed to address the mental health needs of our students. **Before students can be ready to be successful academically, mental health needs to be addressed first to ensure the overall success of our Maryland students.**

Currently I am teaching lessons (in 25 different classrooms) to every student in my building as it relates to Erin's Law - a Maryland Law requiring lessons on personal safety to prevent childhood sexual abuse. In the fall, I taught prevention lessons related to the Start Talking MD law teaching lessons on drug abuse prevention/opioid education. This month, I am also working with 5th grade students to prepare and learn about their options as they transition to Middle School. In March, I will start my lessons at every grade level to teach students online safety.

In addition, school counselors teach other lessons to all students on their caseloads throughout the year

related to coping strategies, communication, managing emotions effectively, navigating peer conflict with active listening to resolve conflict, academic success strategies, as well as goal setting and college and career support. Our curriculum focuses on three domains - personal/social, academic and college/career. **We teach through classroom and small group instruction and this is why we are the ONLY mental health providers in schools that are eligible for NBCT certification.**

**NBCT school counselors have undergone the same rigorous process as NBCT classroom teachers to attain this highly challenging level of recognition in their field.** To attain this, we must be able to recognize student needs, develop specific interventions to address those needs and demonstrate data driven evidence of the direct impact to students based on those interventions. **With the passing of House Bill 551, this inequity and inconsistency between county jurisdictions that currently exists between NBCTs will be corrected at the state level and will be in alignment with the AIB's acknowledgement that school counselors should be included in the career ladder opportunities afforded to professionals who attain NBCT.**

In addition, I continue to do my part to support and address the challenges facing recruitment and retention of high quality school counselors in AACPS. I mentor new counselors for their first 3 years, and supervise interns as I do my part to support the hiring and retention of highly qualified School Counselors.

Last fall, I received an email from AACPS HR stating that I would no longer qualify after this year for any stipend or salary enhancement, even while I have attained the highest level of certifications available for my area of expertise - school counseling – with 3 different certifications. I currently hold national certifications to support both the preventative/teaching side of my role (NBCT) and the responsive counseling side of my role (NBCC and NCSC). Each of these certifications requires that I renew every 5 years to maintain additional education and learn updated information to maintain the highest level of school counseling services for my students. I regularly attend MSCA (state) and ASCA (national) training to maintain a high level of skill as I serve my students.

**Please support and pass House Bill 551. so that we can recruit and retain highly qualified school counselors across the state of Maryland.** School counselors are crucial to support overall student success. MD Blueprint is a state law that is guided by the AIB. The AIB has acknowledged that the intent of the MD Blueprint was to include School Counselors within the career ladder/NBCT opportunities. Again, taking action to support House Bill 551, will result in supporting both recruitment and retention of these critical positions within public schools. **I ask for a favorable Committee report on House Bill 551 to protect this critical service that is provided to students through highly qualified school counselors.**

Please feel free to contact me with any questions or additional information you need.

Sincerely,

Mrs Priscilla Sue Young, M. Ed., NBCT, NBCC, NCSC

Belvedere Elementary School Counselor / [psyoun@aacps.org](mailto:psyoun@aacps.org)

NBCT: National Board Certified Teacher/ School Counseling : since 2020

NBCC: National Board Certified Counselor : since 1998

NCSC: National Board Certified School Counselor / Speciality Area: since 2016