

**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

My name is Daniela Helton and I am a NBCT Counselor at Little Bennett Elementary School in Montgomery County. I am also the elected union representative for all elementary school counselors in Montgomery County. I am writing today for your support of HB 551.

I have asked for AIB and MSDE on numerous occasions to follow-up on Task 2, Objective 4, Pillar 2 – Subtask 2.4.2(b) found on page 99 of the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future Comprehensive Implementation Plan, which calls for AIB and MSDE to develop guidance for the LEAs regarding NBC certification for school counselors, media specialists, and other positions and the requirements to be eligible for the NBC salary increases. However, this has yet to happen.

I have been an elementary school counselor in Montgomery County for 20 years. I achieved NBCT status in 2009 because I wanted to gain this advanced certification in order to impact change. School Counselors have a wide range of responsibilities because we are taught to address the specific needs of our students and to create programs to overcome barriers to ensure student success. For example, one of the targeted groups I meet with each day includes the eight students at my school with the highest level of absences. The interventions I use in this group have helped to ensure these students not only come to school but arrive on time and stay the whole day. This is one small example of how I address the needs of my students to achieve academic success because without my interventions they would not be present and available for learning.

Currently, my LEA is not recognizing the only 15 NBCT school counselors out of approximately 600 school counselors in Montgomery County. Instead, they continue to heavily promote the NBCT process for other educators, and since 2022, MCPS has produced 169 new Blueprint eligible NBCT's.

The NBCT process is important for school counselors because it not only enhances school counselor knowledge and professionalism but it increases retention of school counselors. Montgomery County opened the current school year with 25 school counselor openings, and as of last month we still have 17 openings. School Counselors are leaving the profession and after a recent survey that I shared with the AIB during my last testimony, school counselors have no interest in pursuing NBCT certification if the blueprint ignores them.

The Blueprint for Maryland's Future aims to prioritize equity, but there has been no equity for school counselors and as a result mental health has not become a priority, furthermore many inconsistencies have resulted.

Currently there is no consistency regarding the monetary support among many LEAs throughout Maryland for School counselors. There have also been many inconsistencies as related to the financial support for NBCT certification. For example, when I achieved in 2009 and ten years later when I renewed my certification I received scholarship funding for this process. **All of the sudden**, during the last two years, school counselors have been **excluded** from this funding. **However**, this school year, school counselors were notified that they **will now** be included in the scholarship funding for NBCT certification, **but** they will continue to be left out of the Blueprint eligibility salary enhancement.

Maryland school counselors need you to ensure equity and place mental health as a priority. We are clearly recognized in the Blueprint as eligible for the NBC salary increase. This starts with passing HB 551, which would provide a clear path for LEAs to implement NBC salary incentives and cut the red tape in waiting on AIB and MSDE to issue guidance. **I ask the Committee for a favorable committee report.**

If you have any questions, please reach me at [daniela\\_s\\_helton@mcpsmd.org](mailto:daniela_s_helton@mcpsmd.org) or 301-448-9451.