

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 Holly Kleiderlein and I am an elementary school counselor in Anne Arundel County. In 2006 I was the first school counselor in Maryland to become a National Board Certified Teacher in School Counseling. Six years ago I sat on a committee to review the Blueprint and explained that the process for School Counselors is the same as it is for all other teachers.

School Counselor candidates provide evidence that they teach high school coaches to recognize signs of domestic violence and how to refer their athletes to appropriate resources. They teach elementary students coping strategies so that they come to school and remain in class. They teach first-generation college students how to navigate post-graduation pathways. They challenge procedures so that English Language Learners apply for CTE programs and students of color who qualify for Honors classes are actually enrolled in them.

My county continues to deny school counselors the same salary enhancements as our peers. They continue to state that although school counselors are not excluded from the salary enhancement, we are also not explicitly included. I have recently testified before the AIB, reminding them that in their draft implementation plan, they wrote that they shall meet with MSDE to determine steps for school counselors to be eligible for the salary enhancement, but they have yet to follow through.

The National Board salary enhancement is a way to recruit and retain the most highly qualified educators. Just at a time when students' mental health needs are increasing and there are fewer School Counselors in the pipeline, one would think it crucial to include the only mental health professionals eligible to become NBCTs.

I currently support teacher candidates in my county. I'm helping them receive the salary enhancement for which I do not qualify because my students benefit from having an NBCT. I am also working on my Maintenance of Certification (MOC), even though there is no plan for me to receive the salary increase. It would be nice to know that holding myself to the highest standard in my profession will be rewarded.

House Bill 551 offers a clear path to fix this issue and reinforces that salary increases are needed to recruit and retain school counselors. **I ask for your favorable report.** If you have any questions, please reach me at (410)562-3577 or hkleiderlein@mscaonline.org.