

**Testimony for HB 740
Public Schools - School-Based Mental Health Services - Full-Time Therapist
February 18, 2026
Support with Amendment**

Thank you, Chair Wilkins, Vice Chair Feldmark, and members of the Ways and Means Committee for addressing this issue of behavioral health needs of Maryland's children. The University of Maryland, School of Social Work appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony in favor of HB 740, in strong support for the requirement for public schools to employ a full-time therapist that is on-site to provide needed school-based mental health services to students during the instructional day. Ensuring consistent access to behavioral health care is essential to supporting student well-being, improving academic outcomes, and responding effectively to the increasing mental health needs observed across Maryland schools.

However, as currently written, the bill limits this role to "therapists" licensed and certified by the State Board of Professional Counselors and Therapists. Social workers already provide a significant portion of behavioral health care in Maryland schools and are uniquely trained to address the social, emotional, familial, and environmental factors that affect student well-being. Not including licensed social workers in the definition of eligible professionals would limit school systems' access to the workforce needed to fulfill the goals of HB 740.

For this reason, we respectfully propose the following amendment:

(D) (1) EACH PUBLIC SCHOOL SHALL EMPLOY A FULL-TIME THERAPIST OR LICENSED SOCIAL WORKER THAT PROVIDES SCHOOL-BASED MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES TO STUDENTS DURING THE INSTRUCTIONAL DAY. (2) THE THERAPIST EMPLOYED UNDER PARAGRAPH (1) OF THIS SUBSECTION SHALL BE LICENSED AND CERTIFIED BY THE STATE BOARD OF PROFESSIONAL COUNSELORS AND THERAPISTS OR THE STATE BOARD OF SOCIAL WORK EXAMINERS."

The UMB School of Social Work has a longstanding history of preparing, training, and supporting social workers who provide school-based behavioral health services throughout the state. Our faculty, students, and alumni serve in schools across Maryland, offering trauma-informed care, crisis intervention, counseling, family engagement, and case management. These services have proven vital in addressing chronic absenteeism, behavioral challenges, and the social and emotional needs that directly impact learning.

Our public schools are facing an unprecedented rise in behavioral health concerns among children. This bill acknowledges that supporting mental and behavioral health is foundational to educational success. Children are increasingly struggling with anxiety, depression, trauma-related symptoms, and behavioral challenges. Social workers are uniquely positioned to respond

to these needs because of their comprehensive training in both mental health treatment and the broader social determinants that shape student behavior and academic success.

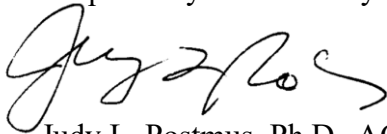
With the proposed amendment, HB 740 would:

- Expand the pool of qualified providers, enabling schools to meet the full-time staffing requirements;
- Strengthen the continuum of care by ensuring students have access to professionals trained in both mental health treatment and systems-level support;
- Promote equity by addressing underlying barriers that disproportionately affect students of color, students living in poverty, and students experiencing trauma;
- Improve student outcomes by embedding social workers who can collaborate with educators, families, and community organizations; and
- Reduce the burden on school counselors, who are often stretched across academic and administrative duties.

Thank you for your consideration of this important initiative. Including licensed social workers in HB 740 will strengthen Maryland's capacity to meet the growing behavioral health needs of students and ensure that every child has access to comprehensive, high-quality care.

I respectfully request a favorable committee report on HB 740 with the proposed amendment.

Respectfully submitted by



Judy L. Postmus, Ph.D., ACSW, Dean & Professor