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Seeking the Green Party nomination for Governor
HB 1205 - FAV

Maryland public schools have 46,884 education support professional positions. Paraeducators, custodians, food service workers, bus drivers, administrative staff, security, skilled trades. They get students to school, keep buildings open, serve meals, and support instruction in every classroom. Right now, 16,017 of them earn less than \$25 an hour.

This is a policy choice. The state's own data confirms what these workers already know. In a Maryland State Department of Education's 2024 survey of support staff, nearly 80 percent said they need a second job to make ends meet. Half strongly disagreed that they can support their families on their current pay. 57 percent have considered leaving their current role due to pay and benefits.

HB 1205 sets a floor: \$25 per hour for education support professionals by July 2028. It is a straightforward bill. If you work in a Maryland public school, you earn at least \$25 an hour.

The General Assembly already accepted this logic. The Blueprint for Maryland's Future established a \$60,000 starting salary for teachers because the recruitment crisis demanded it. There are 2,670 vacant ESP positions statewide right now. The crisis is the same.

The fiscal note estimates a cost in the hundreds of millions of dollars, split across all 24 county school systems. That is real money. It is also roughly one to two percent of total K-12 spending statewide. County boards are the employers, and this bill rightly requires them to pay the wage floor.

This wage floor is needed everywhere, and the data shows it. In Somerset, 73 percent of ESPs earn below \$25 an hour. In Caroline, 72 percent. In Washington County, 69 percent. As these counties work to meet the new standard, the state should be ready to support them through the education aid formula so the floor holds in every jurisdiction.

A paraeducator in Baltimore City might very well make more money stocking shelves at Costco than helping a child learn to read. That comparison is the daily calculation thousands of school employees make every year. When they leave, schools lose the adults students depend on, and the positions sit vacant because nobody is lining up for \$15 an hour in a school when Target pays more.

As the Baltimore Teachers Union testified last session, the people who do this work are disproportionately women and disproportionately Black. Nearly a thousand of their members earn below \$25 an hour. Low ESP wages reflect decades of undervaluing work performed by women of color in Baltimore public institutions. Raising the wage floor is a pay equity measure.

No state has enacted an ESP-specific minimum wage. Maryland would be the first. Pay the people who keep our schools running. I encourage a favorable report on HB 1205.