



Testimony - HB 828, State Board of Education - Membership -
Educational Support Member
Favorable
House Ways & Means Committee
February 25, 2026
Terrence Cavanagh on Behalf of SEIU Local 500

Honorable Chairwoman Wilkins & Members of the House Ways & Means Committee:

On behalf of SEIU Local 500, which represents thousands of educational support professionals across Maryland, we respectfully urge a favorable report on House Bill 828.

House Bill 828 takes an important and long overdue step toward equity in public education governance by adding an Educational Support Professional (ESP) member to the Maryland State Board of Education.

For generations, educational support professionals — paraeducators, bus drivers, food service workers, custodians, school secretaries, security staff, and other noncertificated school employees — have been essential to the daily functioning and safety of our schools. We are the first adults students see in the morning and often the last they see at the end of the day. We support instruction, manage classrooms, provide behavioral interventions, feed children, transport them safely, and maintain healthy learning environments.

Yet despite this indispensable role, ESPs have historically been excluded from the highest levels of educational decision-making.

Teachers have a designated seat. Parents have a designated seat. Students have a designated seat. But the professionals who make up a significant portion of the school workforce — and who work most closely with students in their daily lived experience — have had no formal voice in State Board governance.

House Bill 828 corrects that inequity.

This bill ensures that one of the 13 regular members of the State Board will be an actively working educational support professional elected by their peers statewide. That structure mirrors the teacher member process and reflects a core democratic principle: those most affected by policy decisions deserve representation in shaping them.

Educational support professionals bring a perspective that is too often missing in statewide conversations:

- We understand how policy translates into practice in cafeterias, buses, hallways, and special education classrooms.
- We see firsthand the impact of staffing shortages, funding inequities, and implementation gaps.
- We support students with disabilities, English learners, and students experiencing poverty — often serving as trusted adults in their lives.
- Excluding ESPs from governance does not make policy neutral; it simply makes it incomplete.

At a time when Maryland is implementing the Blueprint for Maryland's Future, we cannot afford incomplete perspectives. True stakeholder engagement means including all components of the school community — not just some. The Blueprint calls for collaboration, workforce stability, and elevating the professionals who serve students. HB 828 aligns directly with those values.

This bill is also about dignity and respect. Educational support professionals are not peripheral to public education — we are foundational to it. Formal representation on the State Board affirms that our expertise matters and that our voices belong in the rooms where decisions are made.

Importantly, HB 828 preserves appropriate guardrails consistent with existing law, including limitations related to appeals matters, mirroring the structure already in place for the teacher and student members. This ensures balance while still providing meaningful participation.

For too long, ESPs have been stakeholders without a seat at the table. House Bill 828 provides that seat.

SEIU Local 500 respectfully urges a favorable report on HB 828 and stands ready to work with the General Assembly to ensure that Maryland's education governance reflects the full community it serves. Thank you to Delegate Ebersole for leading on this important issue.

Thank you for your time and consideration.