



Testimony - HB 1205, Education – Minimum Wage for Education Support Professionals
Favorable

House Ways & Means Committee

March 11, 2026

Travis B. Simon

Executive Director, SEIU Local 500

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

SEIU Local 500 represents thousands of education support professionals (ESPs) across Maryland — paraeducators, food service workers, bus drivers, custodians, clerical staff, and other frontline employees who make our schools run every single day. They are the adults who open buildings before sunrise, who ensure classrooms are clean and safe, who help students with disabilities succeed, who feed children nutritious meals, and who keep schools functioning smoothly.

Yet too many of these essential workers cannot afford to live in the very communities they serve.

House Bill 1205 establishes a minimum wage of \$25 per hour for education support professionals by July 1, 2028. This is not a luxury. It is a matter of dignity, stability, and common sense. The people who make our schools run should only need one job to provide for their families. No education support professional working full-time in Maryland’s public schools should be forced to work nights, weekends, or second and third jobs just to make ends meet. Yet, this is the reality for many.

When school employees are stretched thin financially, physically, and emotionally, it affects students. High turnover, staffing shortages, and burnout disrupt school communities and undermine the very goals of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future. The Blueprint was designed to transform Maryland’s education system and elevate student outcomes. That transformation cannot happen if the workforce that supports instruction every day is underpaid and undervalued.

Educational support professionals are not peripheral to the Blueprint — they are central stakeholders in its success. From implementing community school strategies to supporting special education, improving school climate, keeping students safe, and ensuring operational excellence, ESPs are foundational to achieving the Blueprint's ambitious goals. Leaving them behind in compensation undermines the State's investment in educational excellence.

This legislation also provides time for thoughtful fiscal planning, including a required cost analysis by the State Department of Education. It reflects a responsible path forward while making clear that Maryland values the people who keep our public schools running.

Maryland has committed to building a world-class education system. That commitment must include ensuring that the workers who support our students can support their own families with a single, full-time job.

For these reasons, SEIU Local 500 respectfully urges a favorable report on House Bill 1205. Thank you to Delegate Wims for leading on this issue on behalf of educational support professionals in Maryland.

In closing, we wish to make it clear, we are going to continue to push this issue until it is over the finish line on behalf of the thousands of educational support professionals across Maryland who need it to happen. We would ask that you take it up as serious an issue as the ESP who is considering how to feed their family tonight.

Thank you for your time and consideration.