



Testimony - SB 764, Education - Minimum Wage for Education Support Professionals -
Report on Estimated Cost
Favorable
House Ways & Means Committee
April 1, 2026
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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.

SB 764, as amended and passed by the Senate, takes an important and pragmatic step forward. Rather than immediately mandating implementation, the bill requires the Maryland State Department of Education to produce a detailed, system-by-system analysis of the cost of establishing a \$25 per hour minimum wage for education support professionals. This includes identifying the adjustments needed to the per-pupil foundation formula to sustainably fund these wages statewide.

This approach is both responsible and necessary.

For years, school systems across Maryland have struggled with chronic vacancies and high turnover among ESP positions. These workforce shortages disrupt student learning, strain existing staff, and undermine the stability of school communities. The

root cause is clear: wages that lag behind the cost of living and fail to compete with private-sector opportunities.

By commissioning a comprehensive cost analysis, SB 764 lays the groundwork for a long-overdue investment in the ESP workforce. It ensures that when Maryland moves toward a \$25 minimum wage for these critical workers, it does so with a clear, data-driven understanding of the fiscal impact and the resources required to implement it equitably across all districts.

Importantly, this bill recognizes that funding must accompany policy. Too often, local school systems are asked to do more without the necessary state support. SB 764 helps prevent unfunded mandates by identifying what it will truly take to deliver fair wages to ESPs.

SEIU Local 500 strongly believes that a \$25 per hour minimum wage for education support professionals is not only fair—it is essential to maintaining a stable, high-quality public education system. This bill is a critical first step toward that goal.

We urge the Committee to give Senate Bill 764 a favorable report and continue moving Maryland toward a future where every education support professional is paid a living wage. As you debate on whether to move this bill forward, please consider there are ESPs right now making hard decisions on how to feed their families just to go into work in the morning to support our students most in need of support. Let's get this right and get it done.

Thank you for your consideration.