

BILL: House Bill 916
TITLE: Higher Education - Programs for Behavioral Health Professionals in Primary and Secondary Schools - Requirements and Grant Program
DATE: March 10, 2022
POSITION: SUPPORT
COMMITTEE: Appropriations
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The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) supports House Bill 916, which would meaningfully expand the State's efforts to promote and support the education of behavioral health professionals and to prepare these much-needed professionals for careers in public school systems across the State.

MABE supports the primary initiative of House Bill 916 to establish the Behavioral Health Professionals in Schools Quality and Diversity Grant Program to provide grant assistance to institutions of higher education in the State to develop and grow programs to educate students to enter rewarding careers as school counselors, school psychologists, social workers, and therapists. Importantly, the bill would focus on the need for greater diversity within these professions by requiring the Maryland Higher Education Commission to prioritize grant awards to historically black colleges.

Local boards have always placed a very high priority on providing school facilities, school meals, and programs of instruction designed to promote the physical and behavioral health and fitness of students and to prepare them to maintain a healthy lifestyle as adults. MABE advocates that legislation addressing specific student health issues such as diabetes, allergies, medical cannabis, and other chronic and acute conditions reflect the input of school health professionals and the consideration of available staff and resources. Unfortunately, school systems face chronic shortages of behavioral health professionals and, more specifically, shortages of diverse school personnel from historically unrepresented populations. MABE supports House Bill 916 for highlighting and proposing a means to address these challenges.

For the past two 2 years the pandemic has presented enormous challenges in meeting the physical and mental health needs of students, requiring major changes in school meal programs, responses to the trauma caused by the economic, health, and educational impacts of the pandemic. In addition, the pandemic is imposing extraordinary burdens on school health and behavioral health personnel. MABE believes it is critical that state and local budgets recognize these burdens and the associated costs.

For these reasons, MABE requests a favorable report on House Bill 916.