

BILL: House Bill 488
TITLE: Janet L. Hoffman Loan Assistance Repayment Program - Mental Health Professionals in Public Schools
DATE: February 15, 2023
POSITION: SUPPORT
COMMITTEE: Ways and Means and Appropriations Committees
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The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) supports House Bill 488 in order to expand the scope of the Janet L. Hoffman Loan Assistance Repayment Program to include graduates working in public schools as mental health professionals, including school psychologists, social workers, and mental health coordinators.

MABE greatly appreciates the focus of this legislation on expanding an existing state program to meaningfully enhance the availability of high quality mental health services to our students. House Bill 488 would contribute significantly toward the recruitment and retention of much needed mental and behavioral health professionals in schools across the state. MABE supports the role of the current LARP in providing financial assistance to teachers, including those teachers who work in a Federal Title I school or school identified for improvement by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE). However, the current LARP does not benefit professionals serving in these critically important mental health professions. Therefore, MABE strongly supports the program expansion proposed by House Bill 488.

MABE's support for this bill is grounded in the association's advocacy for the essential staffing and resources necessary to meet the mental and behavioral health needs of our nearly 900,000 public school students. The benefits and value of access to high quality school-based mental and behavioral health services for students and families, teachers and staff, and communities at large can hardly be overstated.

Prior to the pandemic, evidence was mounting that additional resources were needed to provide the holistic array of social, emotional, behavioral and academic supports for all students. Then the pandemic saw a dramatic rise in students reporting experiencing anxiety and depression and other symptoms. Today, students and staff are coping with these accumulated challenges in an environment of educator and other professional staffing shortages.

For these reasons, MABE requests a favorable report on House Bill 488.