

BILL: House Bill 1317
TITLE: Maryland Medical Assistance and Children's Health Insurance Programs - School-Based Behavioral Health Services - Reimbursement
DATE: February 28, 2024
POSITION: SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS
COMMITTEE: Ways and Means
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The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) supports House Bill 1317 with amendments to broaden the approved uses of Medicaid reimbursements and to reinforce in statute the legislature's support for securing Medicaid reimbursements for school-based behavioral health services for all students.

MABE strongly supports the objective of House Bill 1317 to ensure that more students benefit from the services of school audiologists, school psychologists, school speech pathologists, and any other health care practitioner who provides services to a student in a school setting. The Medicaid funding available to support these services will contribute significantly to the services students receive. In addition, this funding will assist school systems in dedicating resources to the hiring of additional social workers, school psychologists, counselors, and other behavioral health specialists critically needed to provide these services.

However, as introduced, the bill would mandate that school systems must invest these additional Medicaid dollars in the four areas stipulated in the bill, including new positions and stipends. While these are all laudable investments, they are not the only ones. For example, the bill would preclude the use of Medicaid reimbursements to support the administrative costs of coordinating and providing services. Therefore, MABE requests an amendment to replace the "SHALL" on page 2 in line 7, with "MAY."

MABE also requests an amendment to have the law require the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) to apply to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services for a state plan amendment that authorizes Maryland to provide for reimbursement for medically necessary school-based behavioral health services provided to all individuals enrolled in the Maryland Medical Assistance Program or Children's Health Program. This state plan amendment is the federally-approved action on which the bill is grounded, and MABE requests that the state law requires this key agency action. Importantly, the state plan amendment is needed to expand Medicaid reimbursement to apply to student services beyond those provided under an Individualized Educational Program (IEP) for children age 3 to 21, or Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) for children from birth to age 3.

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. Fortunately, Maryland is poised to address these needs through programs and initiatives such as the Maryland Consortium on Coordinated Community Supports, Local Management Boards, and the federal funding to support school-based mental and behavioral services to be expanded under House Bill 1317.

For these reasons, MABE urges a favorable report on House Bill 1317, with the amendments outlined above.