

BILL: House Bill 352
TITLE: Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act of 2024
DATE: February 28, 2024
POSITION: SUPPORT
COMMITTEE: Appropriations
CONTACT: John R. Woolums, Esq.

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) strongly supports and greatly appreciates the provision of House Bill 352 which will broaden the approved uses of Medicaid reimbursements for school-based behavioral health services provided by school psychologists and school social workers for all students.

MABE strongly supports the objective that more students benefit from somatic and behavioral health services in both the school and community settings. Therefore, MABE urges the legislature's continued attention to ways in which already available federal can be accessed by both local school systems and community-based providers to benefit children and families. 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 health care specialists critically needed to provide these services.

MABE does support stipulation in state law that the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) is 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 this BRFA provision 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 the provision of House Bill 352 relating to increased funding and access to school-based behavioral health services.

For these reasons, MABE urges a favorable report on House Bill 352.