

BILL: Senate Bill 499
TITLE: State Department of Education - School Psychologist Recruitment Program
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 Senate Bill 499 and the objective to establish the School Psychologist Recruitment Program in the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to provide professional support to individuals who are, or are seeking to become, school psychologists in Maryland. In addition, MABE requests amendments to ensure a broader mission of MSDE's recruitment efforts to include other school-based behavioral and mental health professionals, including school counselors, school social workers, and school nurses.

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. 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 further expansion of school-based mental and behavioral services.

The professional development program and supporting services provided under Senate Bill 499 would significantly contribute to the recruitment and retention of school psychologists and those seeking to become school psychologists.

For these reasons, MABE requests a favorable report on Senate Bill 499, with the amendments described above.