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**Committee:** House Health and Government Operations Committee  
House Ways and Means Committee

**Bill Number:** House Bill 975

**Title:** State Department of Education and Maryland Department of Health – School-Based Health Centers - Ombudsman

**Hearing Date:** February 26, 2020

**Position:** Support with Amendment

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The Maryland Assembly on School-Based Health Care (MASBHC) strongly supports *House Bill 975 – State Department of Education and Maryland Department of Health – School-Based Health Centers – Ombudsman*, with an amendment. This bill would designate an ombudsman position in the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) and the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) to serve as a point of contact for school-based health centers.

There are currently 86 school-based health centers in Maryland, operating in 12 local school systems. They are staffed and supported by community health providers, primarily local health departments, and provide somatic, behavioral, and oral health services. By design, they are located in schools with high concentrations of poverty and act as a safety net provider, particularly for students who experience barriers to accessing health care services in the community. By providing health services on-site, students experience increased seat time and less absenteeism.

In January 2019, the Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education included several recommendations to increase funding for school-based health centers. We were very pleased to see the inclusion of \$6.5 million in annual funding within this year’s Blueprint legislation – *HB 1300*. This funding will restore, with an inflationary increase, an original funding promise made by the State to fund school-based health centers over 20 years ago.

In order for the expansion of school-based health centers to be successful, MSDE and MDH must have sufficient staffing resources and a current assessment of the needs of students and schools across the state. The provisions included in this bill will ensure the State is ready to launch the next phase of growth for school-based health centers by:



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- *Establishing an ombudsman role in the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) and the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to “provide technical assistance to support the establishment and expansion of school-based health centers”.*

MASBHC strongly supports this provision as it formalizes the role of the State agencies in this next phase of growth. MASBHC also supports allocating a portion of the \$6.5 million included in the Blueprint legislation to support staffing positions within the two state agencies to coordinate and support school-based health centers.

- *Requiring MDH and MSDE to provide an assessment of the level of need, the capacity of communities, and the resources needed to establish or expand school-based health centers.*

MASBHC believes that a comprehensive needs assessment for school-based health centers is critical. While there are currently 86 school-based health centers, many do not have the resources to meet the needs of the students in their schools. An assessment is critical in determining the resources needed to expand access to primary care, behavioral health, and dental services in areas with the greatest need.

We would also request the adoption of a technical amendment to remove Section 3 from the bill. This is a vestige from last year’s bill that was completed in the fall of 2019 and reported on earlier this year by the Maryland Department of Health.

Thank you for your consideration of our testimony, and we urge a favorable vote. If we can provide any further information, please contact Rachael Faulkner at [rfaulkner@policypartner.net](mailto:rfaulkner@policypartner.net) or (410) 693-4000.