

FEB 24 2021 SEN BILL 720 TESTIMONY W. Robert Hair,

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Position: FAV



The Maryland School for the Blind

3501 TAYLOR AVENUE BALTIMORE, MARYLAND 21236 410-444-5000

February 24, 2021

The Honorable Guy Guzzone, Chair
Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
Miller Senate Office Building – 3 West Wing
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Senator Guzzone:

RE: SB720/HB1054

We write to provide testimony in favor of SB720/HB1054 Education – Maryland School for the Blind – Pay Plan.

The Maryland School for the Blind (“MSB” or “the School”) was established in 1853 to educate Maryland’s blind and low vision students. MSB provides vital services to more than a thousand students representing every jurisdiction in the state through outreach and on-campus school programs and serves students with a wide array of multiple disabilities in addition to their blindness.

Despite growth in state funding, MSB faces critical financial challenges that if not resolved threaten the School’s long-term ability to carry out its essential mission.

A study requested by the budget committees conducted in 2019 showed that MSB’s financial difficulties are primarily the result of a gradual shift to a more complex student population. In 1975 approximately 30% of the students had multiple disabilities whereas today the percentage is 96%.

Our students have many needs. Some are medically fragile, totally dependent on adults for all self-care needs including toileting, bathing and dressing; some cannot eat without assistance; some have significant behavioral challenges such as biting, scratching, overturning furniture and eloping from the classroom; some are unable to speak or use a computer to speak; some have physical disabilities and use a wheelchair or walking support equipment, all in addition to their visual impairment.

Because the funding formula model has not kept pace with the operational needs for this complex student population, the School has had to implement cost containment strategies. These include leaving positions unfilled, not increasing the number of FTEs, decreasing health insurance benefits for staff and, in some cases, paying wages far below market value.

Though the formula calculation for the base grant is identical to the Maryland School for the Deaf (MSD), funding is 15% lower per pupil, or \$8,400, for MSB than the Maryland School for the Deaf, resulting in \$3.6 million funding disparity between the two schools.

This stands out because the needs of MSB students are more complex than those enrolled at MSD and require a greater level of service and staffing due to their multiple disabilities.

MSB Paraprofessionals are paid 30% less than their Baltimore County Public School counterparts, leading to difficulty in recruiting and retaining these essential staff.

Though MSB has a high percentage of students who are residential, there is no differentiation in funding for residential services, which are more expensive.

There is no mechanism in the education statutes for MSB to fund salary or cost of living increases as there is for the School for the Deaf (The “pay plan” statute Ed. Art. § 8-3A-10).

This legislative proposal tracks similar language in the Code applicable to the Maryland School for the Deaf.

Senate Bill 720 (and House Bill 1054) is needed to address the failure of the State budget to keep pace with the compensation requirements for staff and the increased costs of a changing student population at the Maryland School for the Blind.

The impact of those costs were detailed in reports prepared by the MSB pursuant to Joint Chairman’s Report requests in 2019 and 2020, submitted to the House and Senate budget committees, respectively.

The MSB has been particularly impacted by its inability to pay Paraeducators at a rate similar to their counterparts in Baltimore County, as well as the inability to hire appropriate level of staffing to address the significant needs of our students.

This bill is potentially a significant step to ensuring parity between the Maryland School for the Deaf and the Maryland School for the Blind. Your thoughtful approach will allow the state to begin the process to address the funding disparities identified in MSB’s JCR reports.

The consequences of not changing the funding structure would be MSB reducing services and cutting essential programs to Maryland’s students. This would have a direct negative impact on Maryland’s vulnerable, medically fragile, blind students and their families.

Without the School's services, these students would be at greater risk of being transferred to more expensive out-of-state programs, such as Perkins School for the Blind in Massachusetts (which can exceed \$394,000 annually), and be separated from their families and communities.

I would like to thank Senator Zucker and Delegate Barnes for sponsoring this bill. We appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of this legislation and look forward to working together with State leadership to ensure that not only this generation, but future generations to come, have the availability of a free appropriate public education through the services of the Maryland School for the blind.

W. Robert Hair, Superintendent
The Maryland School for the Blind

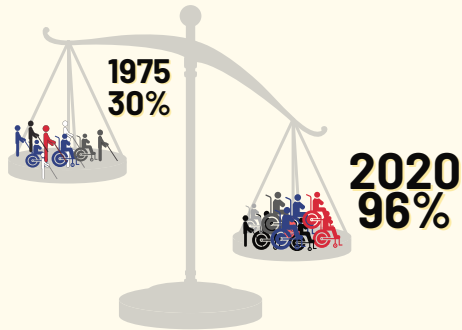
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Position: FAV

MSB STUDENTS ARE NOT JUST BLIND ...ANYMORE

There has been a gradual shift in the on-campus student population to multiple disabilities:



1975: 30%
1995: 70%
2020: 96%



CHALLENGES

- MSB has been understaffed for the past 10 years due to cuts from the previous administration
- ParaEducators paid 30% less than their counterparts
- Health benefits are not competitive
- Pension liability is \$3M/year
- The funding formula has not kept pace with wages, multiple disabilities, and residential costs

THERE IS NOTHING LEFT TO CUT!

MSB AND MSD ENROLLMENT AND FUNDING

Student Population Difference

	Maryland School for the Blind (MSB)		Maryland School for the Deaf (MSD)	
	Number of Students	Percentage	Number of Students	Percentage
Total Enrollment	210	100%	464	100%
Residential	93	44%	74	16%
Day	117	56%	390	84%
# With Multiple Disabilities	202	96% ←	51	10% ←

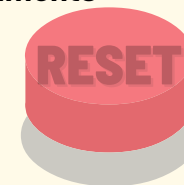
Formula Model Funding Difference

Fiscal Year 2020	MSB	MSD	Difference
Total Funding – FY 20	\$23,947,916	\$33,080,254	(\$9,132,338)
Number of Students	416	500	
Funding per Student	\$57,567	\$66,161	(\$8,593)
	416 X	\$8,593 =	\$3,574,688

ALTHOUGH MSB STUDENTS HAVE MORE COMPLICATED NEEDS, MSB RECEIVES \$3.6 MILLION LESS IN PER PUPIL FUNDING THAN MSD

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Reset the funding formula by increasing the base appropriation to meet the needs of MSB students
- Add weighted funding for both disability and residential placement
- Enact legislation for annual compensation and benefits adjustments



WITHOUT MSB, STUDENTS WOULD BE SENT TO OUT-OF-STATE PLACEMENTS PERKINS SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND COSTS \$394K+ (annually, per pupil) vs MSB \$253K (fully funded in 2023)

Favorable SB720.pdf

Uploaded by: Maneki, Sharon

Position: FAV



Subject: Favorable Support for SB720

To: Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

From: Members of the National Federation of the Blind of Maryland

Contact: Sharon Maneki, Director of Legislation and Advocacy
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Date: February 24, 2021

The members of the National Federation of the Blind of Maryland, the oldest and largest consumer organization of blind persons in the state, urge the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee to give a favorable report on SB720, a bill to create a pay plan for the salaries of teachers and other professionals at the Maryland School for the Blind.

The Maryland School for the Blind is a unique educational institution because it serves students who are not only blind but have additional disabilities. These students need specialized services from psychologists and occupational speech and physical therapists. At the school, they receive instruction from vision teachers and other assistants so that they may become as independent as possible. Students at the Maryland School for the Blind are not able to attend their local school system because of the level of specialized instruction that they need.

The payment plan proposed in SB720 will ensure that the school can recruit, hire, and maintain the professional talent that it needs to provide the specialized instruction and services required for these students. This bill also offers greater consistency in funding for the school which will improve the operation of the school. Students at the Maryland School for the Blind are entitled to a high quality education. Your vote in favor of SB720 is an important step in making this quality education possible.

SB 720 MD School for the Blind Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Zucker, Senator Craig

Position: FAV

CRAIG J. ZUCKER
Legislative District 14
Montgomery County

Budget and Taxation Committee

Subcommittees

Vice Chair, Capital Budget

Chair, Education, Business and
Administration

Chair, Senate Democratic Caucus



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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony of Senator Craig J. Zucker
Senate Bill 720- Education - Maryland School for the Blind - Pay Plan
Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
February 24th, 2021
12:00pm
Position: SUPPORT

Good afternoon Chairman Guzzone, Vice Chairman Rosapepe, and distinguished members of the committee. It is my pleasure to testify today in **support** of **Senate Bill 720 - Education - Maryland School for the Blind - Pay Plan**.

The purpose of Senate Bill 720 is to address discrepancies in State funding for the Maryland School for the Blind compared to their peers. The underfunding of salaries has not kept pace with the changing student population and increased costs at the Maryland School for the Blind. The Maryland School for the Blind has been particularly negatively impacted by its inability to pay professional personnel at appropriate levels, and the fact that every year they have had to cut additional professional personnel from their staff in order to balance the Maryland School for the Blind budget.

Senate Bill 720, requires the Secretary of Budget and Management to establish a pay plan that includes pay plan classifications and pay grades based on duties, responsibilities, education, and training required. The Board of Directors of the Maryland School for the Blind would review the salaries of public school teachers and other professional personnel in Baltimore County. The Board of Directors would recommend to the Secretary of Budget and Management salaries that would be adequate to recruit and retain qualified teachers and professional personnel.

The Board of Directors would provide recommendations to the Secretary of Budget and Management on or before June 1 or July 1 of the first fiscal year in which the pay plan would take effect. Beginning with the third fiscal year the pay plan is in effect and in every third fiscal year thereafter, the Secretary of Budget and Management would adjust the pay plan, if necessary, to ensure that salaries in the pay plan are adequate to recruiting and retaining qualified teachers along with other professional personnel.

This legislation would allow the Board of Directors to review the salaries of public school teachers and other professional personnel in Baltimore County and recommend adjustments to the pay plan to the Secretary of Budget and Management. The Secretary of Budget and Management would review the recommendations by the Board of Directors and incorporate

CRAIG J. ZUCKER
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adjustments into the budget recommendations for the Governor's review in the annual budget request.

For these reasons, I urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 720. Thank you for your kind consideration.

SB 720 MD School for the Blind-Pay Plan (Zucker) B

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Position: INFO



Maryland

DEPARTMENT OF BUDGET
AND MANAGEMENT

LARRY HOGAN
Governor

BOYD K. RUTHERFORD
Lieutenant Governor

DAVID R. BRINKLEY
Secretary

MARC L. NICOLE
Deputy Secretary

SENATE BILL 720 Education – Maryland School for the Blind – Pay Plan (Zucker)

STATEMENT OF INFORMATION

DATE: February 24, 2021

COMMITTEE: Senate Budget & Taxation

SUMMARY OF BILL: SB 720 requires the Secretary of the Department of Budget and Management to establish a standard pay plan for teachers and professional personnel at the Maryland School for the Blind, after considering recommendations from the School's Board. Every three years, the Secretary must review salaries for adjustments, and include the salary recommendations in the recommendations for the Governor's review and approval to be included in the Budget.

EXPLANATION: SB 720 establishes a precedent for the State to be setting salaries for a private, non-profit entity. While the comparison may be made to the Department's role relative to the Maryland School for the Deaf, the Maryland School for the Deaf is a state entity -- the Maryland School for the Blind is not.

The State values the Maryland School for the Blind and awards a significant grant amount to the School for the comprehensive and specialized educational services provided to students whose needs cannot be met in the local school system. The FY 2022 budget allowance for the School is \$24.8 million. However, the teachers and professional personnel at the School are not in the State Personnel Management System.

**For additional information, contact Barbara Wilkins at
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