



SB 831 - Education Support Professionals - Working Group and Bonus

### **SUPPORT**

Dear Chair Guzzone, Vice Chair Rosapepe, and members of the Budget and Taxation Committee:

School support professionals are the backbone of Maryland's school system and essential for creating an education environment where all our children can thrive. They transport our children, provide them with meals, assist families with virtual learning, keep our schools clean, and so much more. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, it was a challenge to attract and retain support staff in our schools. Right now, nearly half of Maryland's educational support staff make less than \$35,000 a year, and statewide staffing shortages have created an additional crisis for Maryland's schools. Maryland can do better for our support professionals. We can begin with providing school support staff immediate bonuses to recognize their role and sacrifice during the COVID-19 pandemic. But short-term relief is not enough. Maryland needs to develop a plan to raise wages permanently, so their wages reflect the value of the work they provide to our schools.

Throughout my career, I have fought for workers by supporting collective bargaining, fair wages, and strengthening workers' voices on the job. I have seen how an empowered workforce improves working conditions, ensures that public services are of the highest quality, and increases retention rates.

For too long, educational support staff have remained in the shadows of fair wage conversations. Without support professionals, Maryland's schools would not be able to provide our children with the education they deserve. It's long overdue that Maryland treats our school support professionals with dignity by paying them the wages they deserve for the services they provide to our students and community. By paying support professionals a living wage, we can alleviate staff shortages, provide teachers and families with the support they need, and strengthen Maryland's schools for our kids.

I want to thank Senators Zucker and King for sponsoring this important legislation and for being advocates for support professionals, schools, and students across our state.

I urge you to vote in favor of SB 831. Thank you.

Tom Perez and Shannon Sneed