



Senate Bill 856

Public Schools – Health Services – School Nurses

MACo Position: **OPPOSE**

To: Education, Health, and Environmental
Affairs Committee

Date: March 8, 2022

From: Brianna January

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **OPPOSES** SB 856. This bill would require each public school to employ a full-time registered nurse, a mandate that is not realistic for the unique workings of Maryland's diverse school districts.

Counties are proud to support public schools and agree with the general merit of the bill that Maryland's public school students deserve access to appropriate health professionals in our public schools. However, SB 856 fails to consider the range of regionally specific student needs that each jurisdiction factors into its hiring and staffing of school health professionals.

Currently, local governments employ school nurses through a variety of arrangements that best suit the unique needs of each school district – some do so through the local boards of education, while others do so through the county departments of health. Counties base this decision on several considerations, including available resources, hiring and management preferences, and collective bargaining. SB 856 mandates that all school nurses be employed through county boards of education.

This would upend successful existing programs in counties that staff school nurses through departments of health. Under the bill, existing school nurses employed by local departments of health would have to be fired or undergo a rehiring process through the local board of education. This is not reasonable nor feasible as the state continues to suffer from a shortage of registered nurses, which is exacerbated by an ongoing exodus of school staff.

Furthermore, SB 856 fails to consider student population density as a varied factor unique to Maryland's diverse locales. While having a registered nurse full-time in public schools with large student populations may make sense for some jurisdictions, it is not necessarily best-practice for schools that have smaller student populations. Additionally, mobile school nurses who are jointly employed by neighboring low enrollment schools may be a more appropriate fit for the needs of some schools and their local jurisdictions. This flexibility not only allows districts to stretch scarce staffing, but also to be financially responsible while still providing safe school facilities for Maryland's students.

Unfortunately, SB 856 would take away that flexibility and would impose a one-size-fits-all approach for employing school nurses, which is not operationally or fiscally appropriate for all counties. For these reasons, MACo **OPPOSES** SB 856 and urges an **UNFAVORABLE** report.