



Committee: Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Bill Number: Senate Bill 856 - Public Schools - Health Services - School Nurses

Hearing Date: March 8, 2022

Position: Support

The Maryland Nurses Association (MNA) strongly supports *Senate Bill 856 – Public Schools – Health Services – School Nurses*. The bill would require local school systems to ensure there is a full-time nurse in every school. Under current law, local school systems are required to maintain a school health program, but there is no minimum obligation for the school nurse staffing.

More School Nurses Needed in Maryland

The National Association of School Nurses has stated that “access to a school nurse all day, every day can improve students’ health, safety, and educational achievement.”ⁱ Maryland falls short of this goal with an average of 0.74 registered nurses for every school, according to data from the Maryland State Department of Education (see attached). There are wide gaps in access to school nursing. The following jurisdictions have less than the average school nurses per school: Anne Arundel (0.62), Baltimore City (0.30), Calvert (0.72), Frederick (0.38), Garret (no RNs in the school system), Kent (0.40), Montgomery (0.57), Somerset (0.67), and Washington (0.36).

Maryland needs just under 400 more nurses to reach the goal of a full-time nurse in every school. The number may be higher if we take into account that more than one nurse may be needed for larger schools.

Why Every School Needs a Nurse

Maryland needs a nurse in every school because students' health needs have become more complex. As we have seen as students return to in-person classes in recent months, students have layers of unmet health needs that impede their ability to learn and integrate into the classroom.

School nurses are essential to support:

- **Students with complex medical needs.** Children with complex needs are those with chronic, severe health conditions, major functional limitations, and substantial health service needsⁱⁱ School nurses are essential in ensuring these students can remain in school;
- **Students with increasing behavioral health needs.** Children and adolescents are facing a mental health crises. Youth suicide deaths have already been on the increase in Maryland. Between 2007 and 2018, youth suicide deaths rose by 21%. Now in the aftermath of the pandemic, children and adolescents are facing even greater risks. Leading health care organizations have declared a "National Emergency in Child and Adolescent Mental Health."ⁱⁱⁱ

Maryland is planning to make significant investments in behavioral health in schools in recognition of the youth behavioral health crises. Yet implementation of new behavioral health programs will be challenging in schools without a full-time nurses. School nurses coordinate all somatic and behavioral health services provided to students.

- **Students with chronic diseases such as diabetes, asthma, and hypertension.** One-fourth of children have a chronic disease, and 5 % have multiple chronic conditions. The numbers of children with chronic conditions has been rising.^{iv} School nurses coordinate care with a student's primary care provider to manage student's chronic conditions and improve their health outcomes. School nurses administer treatments, including medication, to ensure students can remain in school.
- **Students in health emergencies.** It is estimated that 10-25% of emergencies for children occur while they are in school.^v School nurses are the key in managing those emergencies effectively.

How Other States Address School Nursing in Statute

Seventeen states set standards or guidelines for the number of school nurses in state statute:^{vi}

- **A Nurse in Every School:** Two states, Delaware and Massachusetts, require school systems to ensure there is a registered nurse in every school. There is pending legislation in West Virginia.
- **School Nurse Ratios:** Fifteen states set a school nurse ratio, mostly commonly one school nurse for every 750 students. States with ratios are: Alabama, Arkansas, Iowa, Indiana, Louisiana, Maine, Mississippi, North Carolina, Nebraska, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Utah, Virginia, and West Virginia.

How School Nursing is Administered in Maryland

Maryland law requires each local boards of education to maintain a school health program, which includes school nurses. Each jurisdiction can make individual arrangements on which agency employs the school nurses: local board of education (14 jurisdictions), local health department (9 jurisdictions), and local hospital system (1 jurisdiction).

Conclusion

Students have a growing number of complex medical needs, including behavioral health. School nurses are essential to protecting the health of students and ensuring they can remain in school. We ask for a favorable report to ensure that all schools have at least one nurse. If we can provide any further information, please contact Robyn Elliott at relliott@policypartners.net.

ⁱ <https://www.nasn.org/nasn-resources/professional-practice-documents/position-statements/ps-workload>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.childrenshospitals.org/issues-and-advocacy/children-with-medical-complexity/issue-briefs-and-reports/the-landscape-of-medical-care-for-children-with-medical-complexity>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.aap.org/en/advocacy/child-and-adolescent-healthy-mental-development/aap-aacap-cha-declaration-of-a-national-emergency-in-child-and-adolescent-mental-health/>

^{iv} <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5010981/#R41>

^v <https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article-abstract/122/4/887/71309/Medical-Emergencies-Occurring-at-School?redirectedFrom=fulltext>

^{vi} https://www.oregon.gov/oha/PH/HEALTHYPEOPLEFAMILIES/YOUTH/HEALTHSCHOOL/Documents/TFSN/Nationwide_School_Nurse_Funding_and_Requirements_Comparison.pdf

	Employer (2022)	School Nurses	Licensed Practical Nurses	Certified Nursing Assistant	Other Health Services	Enrollment (2018-19)	Schools Count	Students Per Nurse	Nurses Per School
Allegany	LDH	22	1	0	6	8539	26	388	0.85
Anne Arundel	LDH	77	21	135.5	7	83300	124	1082	0.62
Baltimore	LSS	173	0	40	0	113814	174	658	0.99
Baltimore City	LSS	50	3	127	1	79297	167	1585.94	0.30
Calvert	LSS	18	7	0	2	15936	25	885.33	0.72
Caroline	LSS	8	2	7	0	5829	10	728.63	0.80
Carroll	LSS	48	3	0	3	25179	44	524.56	1.09
Cecil	LSS	29	0	0	0	15307	29	527.83	1.00
Charles	LDH	35	9	0	0	27108	38	774.51	0.92
Dorchester	LHD	12	4	1*	1*	4785	13	398.75	0.92
Frederick	LDH	26	8	56	0	42713	68	1642.81	0.38
Garrett	LSS	0	11	0	0	3842	12	NA	NA
Harford	LSS	61	5	0	0	37826	54	620.10	1.13
Howard	LDH	59	0	62	0	57907	77	981.47	0.77
Kent	LDH	2	0	4	1	1912	5	956.00	0.40
Montgomery	LDH	118	0	212	59	162680	208	1378.64	0.57
Prince George's	LSS	198	21	0	2	132667	208	670.04	0.95
Queen Anne's	LSS	14	2	0	0	7749	14	553.50	1.00
SEED School	LSS	1	1	0	1	404	1	404.00	1.00
Somerset	LDH	6	4	1	1	2930	9	488.33	0.67
St. Mary's	LSS	33	3	0	0	17999	30	545.42	1.10
Talbot	LSS	6	0	6	1	4674	8	779.00	0.75
Washington	Local Hospital	16	10	26	1	22681	45	1417.56	0.36
Wicomico	LSS	28	0	9	2	14949	25	533.89	1.12
Worcester	LSS	17	0	0	0	6810	14	400.59	1.21
Statewide		1057	115	685.5	87	896837	1428	848.47	0.74

Notes * 1 person certified as CNA and CMT

Data Source and Years: Nursing data from 2018-2019 MSDE Survey; Enrollment and school count data from 2018-2019 MdReportCard Enrollment Data; the local employer is current year (2022)