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Budget and Taxation Committee

Health and Human Services
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Joint Committees
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Testimony for Senate Bill 856
Public Schools – Health Services – School Nurses
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
March 8, 2022

Chairman Pinsky and Honorable Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to present **Senate Bill 856 - Public Schools – Health Services – School Nurses**.

It is currently within the scope of County government to designate how health services within schools are provided. With the assistance of the local health department (LHD), each local board of education (BOE) must provide adequate school health services, instruction in health education, and a healthful school environment. As a result, there are currently variations in how school healthcare is provided. Currently, in some jurisdictions, local BOE directly hire and employ school nurses. In other jurisdictions, LHD hire and employ nurses for public schools and make decisions in consultation with the BOE about how services will be provided. Different BOEs and LHDs employ different mixes of registered nurses, licensed practical nurses, other certified medical workers, or unlicensed health staff working under the supervision of an registered nurse (who may be responsible for more than one school).

When there is a not a nurse on site, schools rely on certified nursing assistants or even unlicensed school health aides. While these staff provide important support services, only a school nurse can coordinate complex health services, manage chronic diseases, administer medications, and integrate behavioral health services into the schools. An increasing number of our students are coming to school with complex and special health needs. A registered nurse is equipped with the ability to manage these complex chronic issues.

This bill would require each local board of education, with the assistance of the LHD, to provide a full-time registered nurse (RN) in each school, resulting in greater consistency and ultimately better healthcare for students in Maryland public schools. Requiring this of nurses will lead to a higher standard of care for students, resulting in proper treatment of medical issues they may have, and getting them healthy and back to class as soon as possible.

Healthcare in schools is essential for early preventative care as not all parents have the skills to detect ailments in their children or help their children while they are in school. Requiring nurses to have this higher certificate and work full-time will result in a more extensive skill set to properly take care of students. Thank you for your consideration and I urge a favorable report of SB856.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Addie C. Eckardt". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "A".

Senator Addie C. Eckardt