



Committee: Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

Bill Number: Senate Bill 545 – Primary and Secondary Education - Public School Employees - Salaries

Hearing Date: February 28, 2024

Position: Support with Amendments

The Maryland Nurses Association (MNA) and the Maryland Association of School Health Nurses (MASHN) strongly support *Senate Bill 545 – Primary and Secondary Education - Public School Employees - Salaries*. The bill would create a pathway for salary increases for school nurses and other school health staff. This legislation embodies a critical strategy to recruit and retain nurses during a severe nursing shortage. We would request one technical amendment.

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 nurse. 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 the Bill Would Help Address the School Nurse Shortage/Technical Amendment

Local jurisdictions are struggling to recruit and retain school nurses because of the broader nursing professional shortages. Health care programs and facilities generally have higher salaries, making it difficult for local jurisdictions to compete for nurses. The bill would help alleviate the salary gap for school nurses who meet the criteria as determined in the implementation of the bill.

We would suggest a technical amendment that school nurses may work for either the local education agency or the local health department.

On page 3 in line 7, insert "OR LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENT"

Conclusion

We ask for a favorable report. 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>