



Advocates for Children and Youth improves the lives and experiences of Maryland's children and youth by advancing policies and programs across multiple issue areas that tackle racial disparities and improve outcomes to ensure that every child has the opportunity to thrive. www.acy.org

Testimony before the Ways and Means Committee

In AMENDED SUPPORT of House Bill 844- Public Schools- School Psychologists-Reports

Shamoyia Gardiner, Education Policy Senior Associate, Advocates for Children and Youth (ACY)
March 1, 2019

House Bill 844 requires county boards of education to submit to the state department of education, information about the availability of school psychologists in their jurisdiction and detailed strategies to address their availability to students.

While we generally support with the aim of the legislation, we take issue with the flat 750 students to one school psychologist ratio offered in HB 844. The National Association of School Psychologists recommends a general ratio of at least one school psychologist per 1,000 students, noting that for school psychologists offering comprehensive and preventative services like crisis response, behavioral interventions, evaluations, counseling, and more, that ratio should not exceed 500 to 700 students per school psychologist.

HB 844 offers a 1:750 ratio, which we believe is insufficient, given the increasing variety and volume of needs demonstrated by students and families across the state. While the ratio is a significant step forward from the current state average of 1:1,240, **we strongly urge the bill sponsor to consider amending the bill to include an informed ratio that reflects the existing needs of county boards of education.** A survey should be administered as a part of the report county boards of education make to the state department of education so we can determine what an appropriate ratio looks like for Maryland.

HB 844, save for the modification suggested above, is a great example of the kind of proactive policymaking that will have long-term benefits. This bill allows the state department of education to gather enough data about the availability of school counselors and will ultimately allow for the creation of effective, targeted policies to create trauma-informed schools where students feel safe, valued, and well-equipped to meet academic challenges. **ACY supports this bill, if amended.**