



HOWARD COUNTY OFFICE OF COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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Howard County Board of Education
10910 Clarksville Pike
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Dear Chairperson Cutroneo and Members of the Board of Education (BOE):

Throughout the pandemic, we have consistently been reminded of the hard work and sacrifice of many to ensure that our residents in Howard County continue to enjoy high quality public services. From our first responders and emergency workers to those who were required to work on the front lines to provide public services, members of our community have put themselves at great risk during this pandemic to continue the important work of serving our communities in a time of great need.

As a County Government, we have prioritized rewarding those who have sacrificed for the benefit of our residents throughout the pandemic, awarding multiple rounds of COVID-19 bonus pay over the past two years to support those who are performing essential duties for our community. In August, we provided COVID-19 bonus pay to approximately 2,700 full-time and contingent employees to acknowledge the efforts of our workforce to sustain the quality of our services during this challenging time. While not technically County employees, we have also used COVID-19 bonus pay to support members of our Health Department who have provided critical testing and vaccination services and logistical services to keep our community safe as risk levels rose around us.

Just last month, I was alerted to the challenges facing those that provide bus service to our students, who have endured significant vacancy and workload issues over the past several months. In light of the demands being placed on these individuals providing a critical and important service to students and families throughout the County, I committed \$2 million of our County's American Rescue Plan allocation to provide retention bonuses for existing bus drivers and attendants and signing bonuses to attract new bus drivers and attendants. I am grateful to the efforts of our BOE, who utilized our commitment and approved contractual amendments providing financial incentives for our bus drivers and attendants a week later.

Our County continues to be one of the best places to live and grow in our nation in large part because of our incredible educational opportunities, made possible by the tremendous experience, commitment, and hard work of public educators. They have been a lifeline to our students and their families throughout the pandemic, managing the demands of switching from virtual to hybrid modes of instruction, all the while caring for the health and safety of their own families. Now, after over a year of virtual learning, students and educators are now back in

school buildings full-time, learning and growing and again, making progress together, through adversity.

In recognition of the critical role these dedicated individuals continue to play in serving our community and sustaining our high quality of public services and quality of life throughout the pandemic, I am committing \$8 million of our American Rescue Plan allocation to provide bonuses to our educators, subject to our approval of the bonus structure utilized to support school system employees. For our teachers and support staff, these past two years have been especially grueling, and I believe it is more important than ever to retain those committed educators who make our school system among the best in the nation.

Additionally, I am requesting that the BOE seek State approval to use a portion of its \$43.5 million federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER) III allocation to match our \$8 million commitment recognizing the services of our educators throughout the pandemic. Many of our peer school systems, including school systems in Baltimore, Charles, Kent and Montgomery Counties, have provided bonuses to their educators funded solely by federal ESSER III money under the purview and control of local boards of education. We are asking that the BOE match our County's commitment to support our educators and recognize their contributions to our community during this challenging time.

Further, I am requesting that the ESSER III funding provided to support bonuses for our educators be allocated away from any new efforts in the proposed ESSER III spending plan that will create recurring operating budget impacts for the County in the future. Given the incredible financial lift needed to meet the requirements of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future legislation noted by BOE members and school system staff earlier this week, I believe that any new programming with ongoing financial impacts to the County are more appropriately considered through the upcoming FY2023 operating budget process, where these efforts can be contemplated amongst other competing priorities.

Our ability to manage and emerge from this pandemic as a model for the nation is built on the sacrifice of our public servants during this unprecedented time. Our educators have been critical to maintaining our high quality of public services throughout the pandemic. I hope you will join us in providing the support needed to recognize their efforts and service to our County.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.



Calvin Ball
County Executive

Cc: Dr. Michael Martirano, HCPSS Superintendent
HCPSS Staff
Howard County Council
Howard County Delegation