

# MSEA'S ESP BILL OF RIGHTS

## Building a Movement with Power and Purpose



### ONE JOB SHOULD BE ENOUGH!



Every school employee knows that schools simply can't function without education support professionals (ESPs)—the custodians, bus drivers and assistants, administrative and clerical staff, food service, nurses, instructional assistants, classroom assistants, IT, maintenance staff, and others who are greeting, supporting, and caring for students every day. Our communities and school systems trust ESPs with the health, safety, and nutrition of our students.

But a fair wage and respect have rarely accompanied that trust and responsibility. In the past 20 years, wages for these essential jobs haven't kept up with the cost of living and

more and more ESPs are working two or more jobs to take care of their families. Once a source of pride among ESP for their service to the community, support staff jobs are increasingly difficult to fill and hard to justify staying in when working conditions, workload, and morale are everyday issues.

**It's Our Time** "We were first called 'essential' during the pandemic because we kept education happening, we fed students and families, and made sure vital records were kept," said ESP Organizing Committee member Cindy Poper. "But we've always been essential. We've always been the engine that

drives a school building—from creating a clean and healthy school building that greets students and educators each day, to delivering students safely home, and everything in between. It's support staff who create the special spaces and places for education to happen."

Thanks to the hard work of MSEA's ESP Organizing Committee and members who attended the 13 organizing and listening sessions held across the state this fall, the ESP Bill of Rights is now the rallying call to action for progress for ESP wages, benefits, and working conditions in ESP contracts for all job categories.

The committee kicked off the ESP Bill of Rights campaign at MSEA's 2022 Convention and Representative Assembly on October 22 in front of the more than 500 member-delegates representing every local from Garrett County to the Eastern Shore. "We are tired of the fact that less than 50% of school support staff in Maryland make over \$35,000 a year and that one in four make less than \$25,000 a year," co-chair Stacy Tayman told the delegates. "Being an educator should not mean living in poverty."

At the convention, MSEA President Cheryl Bost interviewed special guest Maryland School Superintendent Mohammed Choudhury who wowed delegates with his recognition of unsustainable



### Join the fight for a **living** **wage, fairness,** and **respect!**

Use this QR code to commit to join the ESP Bill of Rights campaign in your school or worksite—



# MSEA'S ESP BILL OF RIGHTS

## Building a Movement with Power and Purpose

### The MSEA ESP Bill of Rights

Education Support Professionals (ESPs) are essential employees and critical to the success of our public schools. School districts must commit to lifting up ESPs by respecting their skills, job categories, and vital contributions to student well-being and school climate.

**LIVING WAGE** One job should be enough for every ESP. ESPs should not have to work multiple jobs to maintain financial independence.

**RETIREMENT** ESPs have a right to a secure retirement. All years of service should count towards a pension.

**AFFORDABLE HEALTH CARE** All ESPs should have access to the same health insurance as other school employees. No ESP should get a "zero-dollar" paycheck to pay health insurance premiums.

**SAFE AND HEALTHY WORK ENVIRONMENT** ESPs deserve a safe and healthy workplace—one that is free of violence and physical, verbal, and emotional abuse and free of exposure to hazardous materials and includes safely maintained equipment. ESPs deserve clear safety protocols, appropriate supplies, trainings on workplace regulations, and whistleblower protections.

**PAID LEAVE** ESPs deserve paid leave, including personal days, sick days, parental leave, and Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) benefits.

**WORKLOAD AND STAFFING** ESPs have a right to a workload that allows them to excel in their assigned positions. ESPs deserve a voice in establishing fully staffed shifts, clear work protocols, and resources that support their job.

**JOB SECURITY** ESPs need a reasonable expectation of renewal year-to-year, a fair probation period, and strong just cause provisions.

**CAREER ADVANCEMENT** ESPs deserve accessible professional development leading to career advancement opportunities. Seniority rights must be protected as ESPs pursue promotions, request transfers, and at times of layoffs or furloughs.

**PRIVATIZATION** ESPs should be free of the threats of privatization that risk the stability of school communities, silence the voice of employees, and further undermine the value of their contributions and their jobs.

**RIGHT TO A UNION** ESPs deserve a strong voice in their workplace—that includes the right to join their union and fight for the rights and protections they deserve. Their union should be free of interference from management and elected officials.



**“Support staff are at the tipping point. The ESP Bill of Rights is making this our time to shine.”**

ESP and teacher wages and its effect on recruitment and retention in all job categories. “The shortage conversation is also a wage conversation,” he said. “I know the Maryland minimum wage is going up to \$15, but...\$15 an hour in Maryland doesn’t get you very far when it comes to housing costs. [It] is not even close to getting you a two-bedroom apartment in Maryland. We should find ways to lead the country on this.

“If Annapolis is serious about this with our historic surplus, raise [the minimum wage] up to the level it should be.” Supt. Choudhury, like hundreds of delegates and visitors,

enthusiastically signed the giant ESP Bill of Rights banner at the convention committing to fighting for support staff.

#### Learn More and Sign the ESP Bill of Rights!

At press time, more than 500 ESP members have completed an information-gathering survey and more than 275 have attended listening sessions. Tayman said, “It is always the same. No matter where in the state we are, we hear over and over again, ‘Thank you for being here. Final someone is listening to us.’”

As the campaign builds, mem-

bers are bringing the ESP Bill of Rights and formal proclamations to their school buildings, local boards of education, and county commissioners meetings and adding hundreds more signatures to it.

“Support staff are at the tipping point. The ESP Bill of Rights is making this our time to shine,” said Cindy Porter of the Organizing Committee.

“As our movement toward recognition and fairness grows, this document sets the stage for bargaining platforms and negotiations teams to improve our jobs and bring back the pride and joy of serving our communities.”

