

# EQUITY FOR ALL KIDS



To: Chair Pinsky and members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee  
From: Shamoyia Gardiner, Education Policy Director  
Re: Senate Bill 1015: Task Force to Study Access to Mental Health Care in Higher Education  
Date: March 12, 2020  
Position: Support

The counseling needs of higher education students have been shifting rapidly since the 1990s. In 2014, a survey administered by the American Psychological Association found an increase in reports of severe psychological problems, including anxiety disorders, clinical depression, frequent crises requiring immediate response, and other diagnoses requiring psychiatric medication.<sup>1</sup> The survey also noted **a sharp increase in the number of clients dealing with the aftermath of sexual assault, as well as those inflicting self-injury.** The transition from high school to college, or from career back into a formalized educational setting is tough on its own—for students who are dealing with mental health concerns, the task becomes even more daunting.

National leaders have demonstrated an understanding of the specific challenges faced in balancing mental health care with the demands of post-secondary education and passed the Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act in 2014. The Act created three programs to address mental health needs: Campus Suicide Prevention; State/Tribal Youth Suicide Prevention; and the Technical Assistance Center.

All three programs have contributed to decreasing instances of suicide in young adults, but **questions still remain as to the specific mental health care needs of students in Maryland's colleges and universities** and whether existing supports are sufficient.

Senate Bill 1015 would create a taskforce to study existing policies and procedures related to mental health care, prevention, and treatment of mental illness in students at higher education institutions across the state; identify best practices, effective models, and barriers to implementing evidence-based changes in policies and program offerings; and make recommendations regarding successful practices to be adopted by the General Assembly, state agencies, and higher education institutions throughout the state to mitigate the impacts of mental illness on student success. With the understanding that this taskforce will produce tools critical to ensuring that all students at higher education institutions in the state will have access to the supportive resources necessary to ensure degree attainment and well-being, **ACY urges a favorable report on this bill.**

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<sup>1</sup> American Psychological Association. *2014 National Survey of College Counseling Centers*