

Testimony before the House Ways and Means Committee  
House Bill 513: Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Program – Established

**\*\*SUPPORT\*\***  
February 17, 2022

On behalf of the National Association of Social Workers, Maryland Chapter (NASW-MD) Social Work in Schools Committee, we would like to express our support for House Bill 513: Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Program – Established.

NASW is the largest national organization of social workers, representing 120,000 social workers and almost 16,000 of those are employed in Maryland. Over 500 school social workers are currently working in Maryland public schools.

In education, school social workers help to remove barriers to learning so that children can achieve to their highest level and are the first line of intervention for students with mental health and behavioral challenges. While many of our youngest learners have had prior school experience in daycare centers or daycare homes, some have not met with success and present for their first public school experience less prepared to learn than their age-level peers. These students not only often fail to optimally benefit from developing critical early skills and fall behind, but they also can disrupt the learning of their classmates.

A study in the *Journal of Family Studies* (June 2020) looked at emotional regulation skills in 3-year-olds, a critical time when cognitive and socioemotional abilities are intertwined. The authors concluded that early intervention, “to bolster the early foundations of emotion regulation could enhance school readiness and prevent developmental cascades of peer difficulties, emerging psychopathology, and academic difficulties in preschool and the early elementary school years.”

Day care centers and day care homes usually know who these children are but don’t always know how to help them and their families. The establishment of the Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Program within MSDE would provide a critical link between providers, families, and children so that vital intervention could begin as soon as possible.

We appreciate your thoughtful consideration of the benefits that this program can provide for Maryland’s children and families and ask for a favorable report.

Respectfully,

Mary Beth DeMartino, LCSW-C  
Executive Director, NASW-MD