



SB199 - Primary and Secondary Education – Comprehensive Health Education Framework – Established Education, Energy and Environment Committee – February 8, 2023

Testimony of Adam Rosenberg, Executive Director, LifeBridge Health Center for Hope

Position: **SUPPORT**

Center for Hope writes in support of SB199, which would codify COMAR regulations that require each county board of education to create an age-appropriate curriculum based on eight standards that were developed by the State Department of Education and the Maryland Department of Health. Suggested curriculum topics for each standard are available on the MSDE website. These topics are not mandatory.

First, the bill's standards can help teach healthy relationships and boundaries, important skills that can help prevent intimate partner abuse, assault, and human trafficking. Second, MSDE's current standards can encompass vital conflict management skills, which many of our schools desperately need.

Research shows that conflict management skills have reduced suspensions, office visits, and fights. (See e.g., *Restorative Practices in Baltimore City Schools*, Open Society Institute (2020); *Middle School Conflict Resolution*, Communities in Schools of North Carolina (2015). The U.S. Bipartisan Safer Communities Act of 2022 authorized \$17 million in federal funding for Maryland schools in to implement comprehensive evidence-based violence intervention programs such as restorative practices and conflict management.

MSDE's *suggested* curriculum topics include lessons on conflict management under several standards in SB199, including II. Mental and Emotional Health and VI. Safety and Violence Prevention, such as the following for middle schoolers:

- Describe helping behaviors that prevent violence. 1d.7.4
- Analyze how situations and/or impulsive behaviors can lead to violence. 1d.7.6
- Identify a variety of non-violent ways to respond to stress when angry or upset. 1d.7.7
- Demonstrate non-violent strategies to manage conflict without harming self or others. 4MS.c

To make sure these suggested skills are actually taught, Center for Hope would also suggest a friendly amendment: P. 2. Line 23 VI. SAFETY, CONFLICT MANAGEMENT, AND VIOLENCE PREVENTION.

“Conflict resolution” is not mandated in Md schools. It is mentioned only as a discretionary part of our restorative approaches law, Md. Code, Educ. Art. §7-306, which encompasses a whole-school approach to alternative school discipline but is not widely enacted. Teaching conflict resolution skills in the Health Curriculum, while not complete, is a good start to help improve school safety and promote learning.

Center for Hope's hospital responders and Safe Streets violence interrupters help victims and families work through emotional responses towards collaborative problem-solving – rather than retaliatory violence. Participants often say they wish they'd had these skills earlier in life.

We urge a favorable report on SB199.

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Center for Hope, a subsidiary of LifeBridge Health, provides trauma-informed crisis intervention and prevention to over 6,000 community members in the Baltimore region each year who have experienced child abuse, elder abuse, domestic violence, and community/gun violence.