



HB119 - Primary and Secondary Education – Comprehensive Health Education Framework – Established House Ways and Means Committee – February 1, 2023

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

Position: **SUPPORT**

Center for Hope writes in support of HB119, which would codify regulations that require each county board of education to create an age-appropriate curriculum that is consistent with the Comprehensive Health Education Framework developed by the State Department of Education and the Maryland Department of Health. The Framework is available on the MSDE website.

Center for Hope, a subsidiary of LifeBridge Health, provides trauma-informed crisis intervention, hospital response, child advocacy, forensic interviews, medical exams, mental health, case management, family advocacy and workforce development services to patients and community members who have experienced child abuse, elder abuse, domestic violence, and community/gun violence. We help over 6,000 violence victims and their families in the Baltimore region each year.

Center for Hope supports this bill for several reasons. First, it helps teach healthy relationships and boundaries, important skills that can help prevent intimate partner abuse, assault, and human trafficking. Second, MSDE's framework includes vital conflict management skills and social emotional well being. Center for Hope's skilled hospital responders and Safe Streets violence interrupters help victims and families work through emotional responses towards collaborative problem-solving – rather than retaliatory violence. Almost invariably, program participants say "I wish I'd had this earlier."

Gun violence is the leading cause of death for young people in Maryland. Most of those deaths are homicides, not suicide. School partners across the state report that young people's level of anger response and emotional volatility have increased post-pandemic. Our schools need help.

The published Framework's suggested School Safety and Violence standards in MSDE's Standard 1d, for example, include the following curriculum components 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
- Analyze techniques that are used to coerce or pressure someone to use violence. 1d.7.8

These skills are vital, but not mandated in Maryland law. For example, "conflict resolution" is a small 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 (Open Society Institute). The conflict resolution skills in the Health Curriculum are not complete, but a good start.

We urge a favorable report on HB119.

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