



UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND  
**SAFE CENTER**

**BILL NO:** House Bill 119  
**TITLE:** Primary and Secondary Education - Comprehensive Health Education Framework -  
Established  
**COMMITTEE:** Ways and Means  
**HEARING DATE:** February 1, 2023  
**POSITION:** **SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS**

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The University of Maryland SUPPORT, ADVOCACY, FREEDOM, AND EMPOWERMENT (SAFE) Center for Human Trafficking Survivors (“SAFE Center”) provides survivor-centered and trauma-informed services that empower trafficking survivors to heal and reclaim their lives. The SAFE Center is an initiative of the University of Maryland Strategic Partnership: MPowering the State, a collaboration between the University of Maryland Baltimore and University of Maryland College Park. The SAFE Center supports survivors of sex and/or labor trafficking of all nationalities, ages, and genders through bilingual case management, mental health, economic empowerment, legal, and crisis intervention services. For the last four years, the SAFE Center has served as the Regional Navigator in Montgomery County and for the past three years, the Regional Navigator in Prince George’s County. In this role, the SAFE Center is responsible for providing services, support, and a safety net for sex trafficking victims under age 24.

House Bill 119 would require the State Department of Education, in collaboration with the Maryland Department of Health, to develop a comprehensive health education framework. This framework must include certain topics including safety and violence prevention. The bill also requires a committee review and comment on the curriculum.

The mission of the SAFE Center is to provide survivor-centered and trauma-informed services that empower trafficking survivors to heal and reclaim their lives, better support them through research and advocacy, and help prevent trafficking. Grounded in a public health framework, the SAFE Center believes that a multidisciplinary approach to trafficking is the only way to holistically address the scourge of trafficking. While Maryland has made progress in addressing the needs of survivors, , insufficient attention has been paid to educators and the role health education can play on prevention and early intervention for kids at risk of trafficking.

While the current comprehensive health education framework was recently updated and includes many important topics, it does not include ***education on the safe and healthy use of technology and online communications to avoid violence and exploitation***. The SAFE Center suggests that amendment language be included to specify that these topics must be included in the comprehensive health education framework.

As noted above, the SAFE Center serves as the Regional Navigator in Montgomery and Prince George’s County, designated to serve and support minor and young adult victims of sex trafficking up to age 24. Based on our experience with this program, sex trafficking often begins by meeting a stranger online where relationship boundaries are blurred and can quickly become unhealthy and dangerous. In addition, the SAFE Center has provided workshops on healthy relationships and signs of human trafficking for more than 1,800 high school students, parents, teachers, and school administrators in eight Prince George’s County middle and high schools. Through partnership building with the schools and surrounding communities, it has become increasingly evident that there exists a gap in knowledge and opportunity to teach topics of healthy relationship boundaries and the risk and vulnerability factors that lead to exploitation.



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For this reason, we strongly support incorporating the topics of healthy online relationships into the health curriculum and including subject matter experts in this area in each county committee to establish and review the curriculum to ensure that it reflects the most recent research and best practices in the necessary areas of instruction.

For the above stated reasons, the University of Maryland SAFE Center for Human Trafficking Survivors urges a favorable report with amendments on HB 119.

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