

House Bill 204 Education - Coaches - Mental Health Training
House Appropriations Committee
January 23, 2024
Position: SUPPORT

Mental Health Association of Maryland (MHAMD) is a nonprofit education and advocacy organization that brings together consumers, families, clinicians, advocates and concerned citizens for unified action in all aspects of mental health and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as behavioral health). We appreciate the opportunity to provide this testimony in support of House Bill 204.

HB 204 requires Maryland public schools and public institutions of higher education to provide mental health training to all coaches participating in athletic programs. This makes good sense.

Pressure to perform can have a profound impact on an athlete's mental wellbeing. In a study of elite Canadian swimmers, it was found that 68% of the surveyed athletes met criteria for a major depressive episode. The depression prevalence doubled among the top 25% of athletes. Female athletes in particular are at risk for depression, according to a study by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I, the NCAA's most competitive division.¹ One study found "many student-athletes report higher levels of negative emotional states than non-student athlete adolescents."²

Injuries are also a frequent catalyst for anxiety, depression, and substance use among athletes. Many athletes may also show signs of posttraumatic stress disorder following a traumatic injury.³ In a study of NCAA Division I football players, 33% of injured athletes reported high levels of depressive symptoms compared with 27% of non-injured athletes.⁴

Studies have shown that coaches can have a profound impact on both promoting the mental health of student athletes and engaging them in help-seeking when they show signs of mental health distress. Yet while coaches can play an important role in supporting athlete mental health, many are unsure what to do. Mental health education is needed to assist coaches in supporting the mental health of athletes.⁵

The data that demonstrates the prevalence of mental health needs among athletes and studies that show the important role that coaches can play in mental health promotion and intervention strongly support the need to increase the availability of mental health training for coaches. For this reason, MHAMD supports HB 204 and urges a favorable report.

¹ Yang J, Peek-Asa C, Corlette JD, et al. [Prevalence of and risk factors associated with symptoms of depression in competitive collegiate student athletes.](#) *Clin J Sport Med.* 2007;17(6):481-487.

² Neal TL, Diamond AB, Goldman S, et al. [Interassociation recommendations for developing a plan to recognize and refer student-athletes with psychological concerns at the secondary school level: a consensus statement.](#) *J Athl Train.* 2015;50(3):231-249.

³ Specialized care supports athletes' unique mental health needs. The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center. News release. February 7, 2022. Accessed March 14, 2022. <https://osuwmc.multimedia-newsroom.com/index.php/2022/02/07/specialized-care-supports-athletes-unique-mental-health-needs/>

⁴ Brewer BW, Petrie TA. A comparison between injured and uninjured football players on selected psychological variables. *Acad Athl J.* 1995;10:11-18.

⁵ Determining the role of sport coaches in promoting athlete mental health: a narrative review and Delphi approach. *BMJ Open Sport Exerc Med* v.6(1). January 27, 2020. Accessed January 15, 2024. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7011013/>

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