

To: Members of the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
Members of the House Appropriations Committee
Members of the House Ways and Means Committee

From: Daniel Zimet, PhD, CMPC
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President, The Mid-Atlantic Consortium of Sport and Performance Psychology
(MAC-SAPP)

RE: Education – Coaches - Mental Health Training

On behalf of myself and the Mid-Atlantic Consortium of Sport and Performance Psychology (MAC-SAPP), I want to register our support for the *Education - Coaches - Mental Health Training* legislation, which would require training for coaches to recognize signs of mental illness and behavioral distress in student-athletes.

Our mission at MAC-SAPP is to collaboratively stay apprised of; contribute to the development and dissemination of; and promote innovative approaches and evidence-based practices among professionals and consumers in sport, exercise, and performance psychology (see www.MACSAPP.net). As some of the most experienced and well-trained professionals in the shared mental health and sports space, we are uniquely aware of coaches' role in supporting athlete wellness.

Student-athletes are at similar risk for common mental health diagnoses as their same-aged peers but face greater stigma when considering opening up about their struggles. Additionally, athletes experience heightened stress due to the competitive atmosphere and time commitment demanded by sport. Unfortunately, coaches are rarely trained to identify warning signs of mental health distress, nor are they informed on how to connect struggling students with needed support.

Education - Coaches - Mental Health Training will require the Maryland State Department of Education and the Maryland Higher Education Commission to

develop guidelines for public schools and institutions of higher education to train coaches to recognize indicators of mental illness and behavioral distress in student athletes. Public schools and public institutions of higher education that offer athletic programs would be required to provide training to coaches based on those guidelines so that coaches can better detect when a student-athlete is exhibiting signs of mental health distress, including but not limited to conditions like anxiety, depression, disordered eating, and suicidal ideation. It would also teach coaches best practices for approaching students compassionately and referring them to appropriate resources. The coach would not be expected to provide mental health care; rather, they would be responsible for communicating their concern to the athlete and connecting the athlete to appropriate resources.

With teen suicide rates on the rise, we must do everything possible to identify and support at-risk students. *Education - Coaches - Mental Health Training* is a common-sense measure to safeguard the well-being of young athletes across our state. The guidelines and training it implements will empower coaches to create a health and safety culture for the students they mentor. As such, I endorse support of this legislation on behalf of myself and MAC-SAPP.

Sincerely,

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