

MedChi

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TO: The Honorable Ben Barnes, Chair
The Honorable Vanessa E. Atterbeary, Chair
Members, House Appropriations Committee
Members, House Ways and Means Committee
The Honorable Dalya Attar

FROM: Pamela Metz Kasemeyer
J. Steven Wise
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DATE: January 23, 2024

RE: **SUPPORT**– House Bill 204 – *Education – Coaches – Mental Health Training*

The Maryland State Medical Society (MedChi), the largest physician organization in Maryland, **supports** House Bill 204.

House Bill 204 requires the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), in collaboration with the Maryland Department of Health (MDH), each County Board of Education, and the Maryland Public Secondary Schools Athletic Association, to develop guidelines for public schools to train coaches to recognize indicators of mental illness and behavioral distress in students and requires public schools that offer an athletic program to provide training to their coaches. The legislation also requires the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC), in collaboration with MDH, to develop guidelines for the training of coaches in public institutions of higher education regarding mental health and behavioral distress of their athletes.

Access to and the provision of mental health services has been a priority of the Maryland General Assembly over the last few years. However, critical to successfully providing needed services to individuals experiencing mental health challenges and behavioral distress is the identification of those needs. Identification of behavioral health challenges in children, adolescents, and young adults is particularly challenging, given the well-documented fact that many students do not recognize their own issues until they escalate and/or students hide their challenges out of fear of creating a negative impression of their skills, talents, and potential.

Coaches play an important role in the lives of their student athletes and may often be the first

individuals to have an opportunity to identify and respond to mental health challenges. Providing training to coaches so that they have the knowledge and skills to identify and respond to their athletes' mental health challenges will enable them to better provide initial support as well as refer them to appropriate resources. Proper training will also enhance a coaches' ability to create a supportive environment for their athletes, which can better promote positive mental health. The pressure to perform as well as the impact of injuries on student athletes impacts the likelihood that a student athlete may experience behavioral distress and various studies have found that the incidences in mental health challenges in student athletes is greater than the general population. Training coaches, as required by House Bill 204, will have a meaningful impact on addressing the mental health challenges of their athletes. For those reasons we request a favorable report.

For more information call:

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