



January 19, 2024

The Honorable Ben Barnes  
Appropriations Committee  
House Office Building - Room 121  
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Support – House Bill 204: Education - Coaches - Mental Health Training

Dear Chairman Barnes and Honorable Members of the Committee:

The Maryland Psychiatric Society (MPS) and the Washington Psychiatric Society (WPS) are state medical organizations whose physician members specialize in diagnosing, treating, and preventing mental illnesses, including substance use disorders. Formed more than sixty-five years ago to support the needs of psychiatrists and their patients, both organizations work to ensure available, accessible, and comprehensive quality mental health resources for all Maryland citizens; and strive through public education to dispel the stigma and discrimination of those suffering from a mental illness. As the district branches of the American Psychiatric Association covering the state of Maryland, MPS and WPS represent over 1000 psychiatrists and physicians currently in psychiatric training.

MPS/WPS strongly support House Bill 204: Education - Coaches - Mental Health Training (HB 204). Mental health first aid is a training program designed to help individuals identify, understand, and respond to someone who may be experiencing a mental health or substance use challenge. Coaches have an important role in the lives of their athletes, and they can play a crucial role in helping them manage mental health challenges. Therefore, coaches should be taught to recognize indicators of mental illness and behavioral distress in students.

Coaches are often the first point of contact for young athletes struggling with mental health issues. By providing coaches with the knowledge and skills needed to identify and respond to mental health challenges, they can better support their athletes and help them access the resources they need. Mental health training can help coaches recognize the signs and symptoms of mental health challenges, provide initial support, and refer athletes to appropriate resources, such as mental health professionals. Coaches can also learn how to create a supportive and inclusive environment for their athletes, which can promote positive mental health.

Overall, providing coaches with mental health training can help them become better equipped to support their athletes' mental health and well-being. Therefore, for all the reasons above, MPS and WPS ask the committee for a favorable report on HB 204. If you have any questions with regard to this testimony, please feel free to contact Thomas Tompsett Jr. at [tommy.tompsett@mdlobbyist.com](mailto:tommy.tompsett@mdlobbyist.com).

Respectfully submitted,  
The Maryland Psychiatric Society and the Washington Psychiatric Society  
Legislative Action Committee