

Testimony in Support of House Bill 204 (Favorable)
Education - Coaches - Mental Health Training

To: Delegate Ben Banes, Chair, and Members of the House Appropriations Committee
From: Julian Pinard
Date: January 19, 2024

I am a junior at Bethesda Chevy Chase High School. I am submitting this testimony in support of House Bill 204, which seeks to require all public school athletic coaches in Maryland public schools to be trained on recognizing indicators of behavioral distress and mental illness in students. Passing this bill would play an important role in advancing the safety and well-being of students in Maryland. Specifically, coaches, who play significant roles in many students' lives, can monitor students' overall mental health and make sure that they are safe.

Over the years, there has been a decline in students' mental health. Some factors for the decline include, but are not limited to: societal pressures, academic expectations, the increasing usage of technology, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Sports can also be another factor, as the competitive nature and pressure to perform well is also stressful. To cope, students often turn to dangerous substances, eating disorders, self-harm, and more.

Athletics are a large part of some students' lives, many of whom take hours out of their day to practice with their team and coach. These sports are also a lifeline for some students, because not everyone can afford college and students may depend on their sport to bless them with a scholarship. As a result, coaches are often students' most trusted adults in their lives. Coaches spend large amounts of time with their students and get to know each of them very well.

School athletes in Maryland deserve to receive the help that they need in times of severe distress, as it never ends well when mental health issues go undetected. The State should provide adequate training to coaches for them to monitor and assist their students. For these reasons, I ask that House Bill 204 be passed.