

HB 829 -FIN -MDH-LOSAA.docx.pdf

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DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Wes Moore, Governor · Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor · Laura Herrera Scott, M.D., M.P.H., Secretary

March 21, 2024

The Honorable Pamela Beidle
Chair, Senate Finance Committee
3 East, Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: House Bill 829 – Public Health - Service Sector Employees - Mental Health Awareness and Skills Building Training – Letter of Support as Amended

Dear Chair Beidle and Committee Members:

The Maryland Department of Health (Department) respectfully submits this letter of support as amended for House Bill (HB) 829 – Public Health - Service Sector Employees - Mental Health Awareness and Skills Building Training.

The Department supports the bill's purpose of providing virtual mental health training to increase mental health awareness and literacy. Research has shown that mental health literacy positively impacts people, as it helps them identify resources, enhances confidence and self-efficacy, reduces stigma, increases the likelihood of seeking therapy, and allows individuals, adults, and youths to apply the acquired skills correctly. The amendments to HB 829 rename the virtual asynchronous training program requested by the legislation to Mental Health Awareness and Skills Building Training to distinguish them from the Mental Health First Aid program owned by the National Council for Mental Wellbeing.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted a concerning rise in mental health problems among young people, young adults, and adults, with an even more significant impact on those with pre-existing mental health issues, physical disabilities, and individuals belonging to racial and ethnic minorities. While there would still be a cost, the Department understands that this bill is subject to budget constraints and would work to administer this based on available funds.

Once the Mental Health Awareness and Skills Building Training is available, the Department can collaborate with the Maryland Department of Labor and Public Service Commission to create a public awareness campaign as mandated by the legislation, subject to the limitations of the state budget. The campaign will promote the availability of this training, subject to budget constraints. The Department favors developing virtual asynchronous mental health training to educate people about the significance of mental health issues at a time and location that meets their needs, particularly with individuals in the Service Sector who may not work Monday - Friday daytime hours.

If you would like to discuss this further, please do not hesitate to contact Sarah Case-Herron, Director of Governmental Affairs at sarah.case-herron@maryland.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Laura Herrera Scott", is enclosed within a faint, irregular white outline.

Laura Herrera Scott, M.D., M.P.H.
Secretary

HB829_MRA_INFO.pdf

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Position: INFO

MARYLAND RETAILERS ALLIANCE

The Voice of Retailing in Maryland



**HB829 Public Health - Service Sector Employees - Mental Health Awareness and Skills Building Training
Finance Committee
March 21st, 2024**

Position: Informational

Background: HB829 would require the State to develop a mental health awareness training program for the service industry sector in Maryland.

Comments: The Maryland Retailers Alliance (MRA) applauds the goal of increasing mental health awareness in Maryland. HB829 would require the Departments of Health and Labor to develop and publicize a mental health training program for employees of the service industry sector in the state. We agree that access to such a resource could make employees more comfortable when responding to patrons and customers who may be in crisis.

When HB829 first came to MRA's attention, we were under the impression that training participation would be mandatory for all service sector employees. We reached out to the sponsor and were assured that she had no intentions of imposing training mandates on businesses. We appreciate her attention to the business community's concerns and would not oppose the development of a **voluntary** training resource. Some large businesses already have similar resources available for employees and there are currently many public campaigns and organizations working to decrease the stigma surrounding mental health struggles and illnesses. A voluntary training program from the State would be a positive addition to these resources, and MRA will remain neutral on the proposal unless participation were to become mandatory.

Thank you for your consideration.