



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

February 28, 2024

The Honorable Joseline A. Peña-Melnyk
Chair, Health and Government Operations Committee
Room 241, House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: House Bill 829 – Public Health - Service Sector Employees - Mental Health First Aid Training – Letter of Support with Amendment

Dear Chair Peña-Melnyk and Committee Members:

The Maryland Department of Health (Department) respectfully submits this letter of support with amendment for House Bill (HB) 829 – Public Health - Service Sector Employees - Mental Health First Aid Training.

Mental Health First Aid is a proprietary training course from the National Council for Mental Wellbeing training course. It is a skills-based course that teaches participants about mental health and substance use issues. The training is open to individuals, professionals, businesses, and community members. The objective of the course is to enable the participants to respond to individuals experiencing mental health or substance abuse concerns or crises. The Department has successfully partnered with the Maryland Mental Health Association to train over 80,000 individuals on Mental Health First Aid.

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. To distinguish it from the program owned by the National Council for Mental Wellbeing, the Department suggests renaming the virtual asynchronous training program requested by the legislation to Mental Health Awareness and Skills Building Training.

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. There is a cost associated with making this training available and promoting it. Should funds be available, the Department can play a crucial role in reaching the objective of the proposed legislation by fostering mental health awareness, developing mental health skills, and reducing stigma.

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 day time 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 "L. Herrera Scott".

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

AMENDMENT NO. 1

On page 2, line 13, strike “**MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID.**” and replace with “**THE MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS AND SKILLS BUILDING.**”

Explanation: To distinguish the training by the department from the program owned by the National Council for Mental Wellbeing.

AMENDMENT NO. 2

On page 3, line 4, strike “**THE MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID TRAINING PROGRAM**” and replace it with “**THE MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS AND SKILLS BUILDING TRAINING PROGRAM.**”

Explanation: To distinguish the training to be offered by the Maryland Department of Health from the program owned by the National Council for Mental Wellbeing.

AMENDMENT NO. 3

On page 3, line 17, strike “**THE MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID TRAINING PROGRAM**” and replace it with “**THE MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS AND SKILLS BUILDING TRAINING PROGRAM.**”

Explanation: To distinguish the training to be offered by the Maryland Department of Health from the program owned by the National Council for Mental Wellbeing.

AMENDMENT NO. 4

On page 4, line 1, strike “**THE MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID TRAINING PROGRAM**” and replace it with “**THE MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS AND SKILLS BUILDING TRAINING PROGRAM.**”

Explanation: To distinguish the training to be offered by the Maryland Department of Health from the program owned by the National Council for Mental Wellbeing.