

HB612 Written Testimony – Ways and Means Committee (2/12 at 1:00 PM) Public
Schools - Lifesaver Schools Program - Establishment
American Youth Association
Emmanuella Umoh- **College Park Academy**- High School Student

Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and members of the Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Emmanuella Umoh, and I am a high school student from Prince George's County in Riverdale City. I write to you on behalf of students across Maryland to urge a favorable report on House Bill 612, which seeks to establish the Lifesaver Schools Program.

I believe mental health services are essential for schools to provide because, for many students, school is the only place where they can access the support they need. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), one in six U.S. youth aged 6-17 experiences a mental health disorder each year (and half of all mental health conditions begin by age 14), yet over half of them do not receive treatment. In Maryland, nearly 30% of high school students report feeling sad or hopeless for extended periods, a statistic that highlights the urgency of expanding mental health resources in schools.

This issue matters to me personally because I have seen firsthand how the lack of accessible mental health support impacts students. In my school, I've witnessed peers struggle with anxiety, depression, and stress, often feeling like they have nowhere to turn. As a student advocate, I've worked on initiatives to promote mental health, but I've also seen how students disengage when their mental health is not prioritized. No one can focus on their education when they are battling an internal storm.

Supporting students' mental well-being is vital to their success because mental health and academic performance are deeply connected. Studies show that students with untreated mental health conditions are more likely to miss school, struggle academically, and face disciplinary

action. Investing in school-based mental health programs isn't just about crisis intervention—it's about ensuring that students have the tools and resources to thrive.

Accordingly, I respectfully request a favorable report on HB612 from the committee. By passing this bill, Maryland can take a crucial step toward making schools not just places of learning, but places where students feel safe, supported, and empowered to succeed.

Thank you for your time and consideration.