



BALTIMORE COUNTY
**STUDENT
COUNCILS**



HB612 Written Testimony – Ways and Means Committee (2/12 at 1:00 PM)

Public Schools - Lifesaver Schools Program - Establishment

Baltimore County Student Councils, Maryland Association of Student Councils

Emily Noonan - Dulaney High School Student

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

My name is Emily Noonan and I am a student from Baltimore County. I serve in leadership positions in both the Baltimore County Student Council and the Maryland Association of Student Councils. Both organizations have passed resolutions in favor of this bill, voted on by a delegation of elected and appointed officials, voting student delegates, regional student government presidents, and several others. Consequently, I am writing to you on behalf of students in Maryland to request a favorable report on House Bill 612.

I've seen the impacts of mental health issues firsthand. By my sophomore year, three students at my school had taken their own lives; tragically, that number now stands at four. After this loss, a grief counselor was brought into our school for one day—and then nothing. I was so confused by this. Why weren't we focused on preventing more tragedies? Surely the administration has resources they can provide, right? When I asked our administration about the availability of these resources, I was quickly dismissed.

A whopping 22% of students seriously considered committing suicide¹ and the rise in suicidal trends not only in my school, but also at the county and state levels, is terrifying. It has reached a point where students are taking action because waiting for adults and administrators to do so can cost lives. We know that schools can do more. The students of Maryland are calling on our legislators to ensure that they do. Please do your part in ending the reactive environment surrounding mental health crises, and assist in forming a proactive and preventative climate throughout the state.

This bill, accurately entitled the Lifesavers Bill, incentivizes schools—by designating them as a Lifesavers School—to utilize free mental health resources provided by local and state Boards of Education. The Lifesavers Program is necessary in public schools because the installation of evidence-based first aid training, wellness centers, and both school and community educational assemblies are vital to saving lives. They should be required in schools in the same way that air conditioning and nurses are; because mental health is just as important as physical health. This bill would create an avenue for school systems to promote mental health resources in a manner that uplifts students and local communities, reflecting the impact of the various inequities that have led to the introduction of this legislation.

I have worked very closely on this bill for the past two years, striving to set up a system in our public schools that supports struggling students. This bill provides a perfect pathway to do this. Accordingly, I respectfully request a favorable report on HB612 from the committee. Thank you for your time.

¹ “Mental Health.” *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 6 Dec. 2023, www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/mental-health/index.htm.