

HB612 Written Testimony – Ways and Means Committee

Public Schools - Lifesaver Schools Program - Establishment

Howard County Student Councils & Maryland Association of Student Councils

Saanvi Venumbaka - Hammond High School Student

Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and Members of the Ways and Means Committee,

My name is Saanvi Venumbaka, and I am a student from Howard County. I serve in my school's student government, am an appointed staff member of the Howard County Association of Student Councils (HCASC), and am a member of the Civic Engagement Committee in the Maryland Association of Student Councils (MASC). I write to you on behalf of Maryland students to request a favorable report on House Bill 612.

According to a recent article from Howard County, 1 in 5 high school students considered suicide in the 2021-2022 school year. That means 1 in 5 families could have lost a loved one. This crisis extends beyond high schools, affecting middle and elementary school students who struggle with depression, anxiety, and self-harm.

This is not just a statistic—it's a deeply personal reality. Throughout middle and high school, I have witnessed firsthand the dangers of deteriorating mental health. Many of my friends have struggled with suicidal thoughts and self-harm. I tried to help, but I lacked the proper training and resources to support them effectively. While some are doing better now, the question remains: Where are the resources that should have been there for them?

HB612 is a crucial bill that will provide students with essential mental health resources, from therapy dogs to wellness programs. Peer-mentoring initiatives are especially important, as students often feel more comfortable confiding in their peers than in adults. Additionally, first aid training is vital—life is unpredictable, and equipping students with the skills to respond in emergencies could save lives.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to issue a favorable report on HB612. Thank you for your time and consideration.