

HB612 Written Testimony – Ways and Means Committee (2/12 at 1:00 PM)
Public Schools - Lifesaver Schools Program - Establishment
American Youth Association,
Oscar Diaz - Baltimore Polytechnic Institute High School Student

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

My name is Oscar Diaz and I am a student from Baltimore City. I write to you on behalf of students in Maryland to request a favorable report on House Bill 612.

I have witnessed firsthand the devastating impact of poor mental health on students. By my junior year, two of my classmates had taken their own lives, and many others were too unwell to attend school in person. When tragedy struck, officials arrived with speeches and pamphlets, offering words of support and promises of change. But by the twelfth hour, they were gone, and the conversation disappeared with them. Meanwhile, students continue to suffer in silence, battling an invisible crisis that demands more than temporary attention. We cannot afford to treat mental health as a passing issue. We need sustained action, real resources, and a commitment that extends beyond a single day of awareness—because lives depend on it.

Yes, flooding schools with officials to deliver impassioned sermons about mental health awareness is well-intentioned—but it does not truly lead to change. When we engage in deep, emotional conversations about mental health without ongoing support, these initiatives show minimal effects on changing behavior. Awareness alone is not enough; action must follow. Schools have the capacity to do more, and the students of Maryland are calling on our legislators to ensure that they do. We are not asking to radicalize the system, but rather to encourage schools to fulfill their fundamental purpose: to educate, uplift, and empower the next generation of innovators.

The Lifesavers Bill does just that—it allows schools to fulfill their fundamental purpose. This bill will create a new designation, officially called the "Lifesavers School," but in my heart, it's named A Promise Kept—a commitment to ensuring that no student suffers in silence or loses their life when action could have made the difference. Now more than ever, first aid training, wellness centers, and both school and community educational assemblies are vital in saving lives. This initiative will equip schools with the tools to provide immediate, tangible support through trained professionals, crisis intervention, and preventative care. By integrating first aid training, teachers, students, and staff will be empowered to recognize signs of distress and respond effectively before crises escalate. Beyond school walls, the Lifesavers Bill will strengthen community ties, fostering open conversations about mental health and ensuring students have a support system both inside and outside the classroom. This bill isn't just about saving a life—it's about saving a lifetime, giving students the chance to grow, dream, and thrive, knowing they are never alone. The students of Maryland are calling on legislators to stand with us—to keep the promise, to be the lifeline, and to change the future.

Accordingly, I respectfully request a favorable report on HB612 from the committee. Thank you

Oscar Diaz

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for your time.