

To the House Appropriations Committee:

My daughter graduated from St. Mary's College of Maryland in 2019. She was there for five years instead of four because her mental health issues necessitated a year's leave of absence.

Specifically, my daughter has panic disorder. It is related to anxiety disorders, which according to the National Institutes of Mental Health affect roughly one-third of all adolescents. She also has been diagnosed with ADHD. When she enrolled as a freshman, the school's disability rights coordinator--an economics professor handling disability issues in his spare time--assured us that St. Mary's could offer Emma all the support she needed to be successful.

It didn't. It simply does not have the money or the staff. St. Mary's is a small campus in a rural area. When Emma arrived, the 24-hour emergency mental health care the college "provided" consisted of the 1-800 number for the National Suicide Prevention Hotline. There was usually at least a two-week wait to see a counselor. The clinic's walk-in hours were only two hours a day, on weekdays, and the waiting room was always full. Psychiatric appointments, a necessity for students on medication, are from a doctor who is on campus only 6 hours a week.

The Center has four counselors for a student body of 1,500. They are there from 9-5 on weekdays, have significant administrative tasks, and take turns being on call. The only alternative is referral to local counselors. Not all students have cars, and those providers are often booked weeks in advance, too.

St. Mary's students need 24-7 access to mental telehealth services. The college also needs money for additional staff. But St. Mary's needs are different from schools in more urban settings; there is no one-size-fits-all solution. We need a task force to study this issue. I urge a favorable report from this committee on House Bill 1504.

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