

**House Bill 1504 Task Force to Study Access to Mental Health Care in Higher Education**

Appropriations

March 5, 2020

**Position: SUPPORT**

The Mental Health Association of Maryland is the state's only volunteer, nonprofit citizen's organization that brings together consumers, families, professionals, advocates and concerned citizens for unified action in all aspects of mental health and mental illness. We appreciate this opportunity to submit testimony in support of House Bill 1504.

HB 1504 seeks to establish a task force to study the policies and procedures of mental health care in higher education, recommend ways to reduce the costs and barriers to providing access to mental health services.

According to the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, one in four Americans struggle with a diagnosable mental health problem. Ages 18 – 24, when many young people are in college, is when mental health disorders can often arise. The American Council on Education's Higher Education Blog, published in December of 2018, notes that, "Recent survey data indicate that in the past year, three out of five students experienced overwhelming anxiety, and two out of five students were too depressed to function." The blog goes on to state that only 10 – 15% of these students ever make it to their college campus counseling centers, noting the need to rethink how we offer mental health services to students.<sup>1</sup> **If you consider an average college campus with 20,000 students, 12,000 would be struggling with anxiety, 8,000 would be depressed and only 1,000 – 1,500 would be getting care.**

And, while many colleges have counseling centers on campus, most are overloaded and can only offer a few visits per student. In these situations, students that need more, or acute care, are often referred out to community providers. These community providers likely do not take insurance and have long wait times for getting new patients in. This has been noted in many articles about Maryland's higher education system in the last several years as many campus counseling centers have lost, not gained, funding. Student mental health should be a core component of services on campus, not a luxury.

MHAMD supports the development of a Task Force to Study Access to Mental Health Care in Higher Education and would welcome the opportunity to serve with the group. It is vital that we make sure to have the appropriate supports and services in place on campus' across our state, to meet the needs of students.

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<sup>1</sup> Roy, Nance. "The Rise of Mental Health on College Campuses: Protecting the Emotional Health of Our Nation's College Students," *Higher Education Blog*, December 18, 2018.

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