

**SENATE EDUCATION, HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
SENATE BILL 896: COMMISSION ON STUDENT BEHAVIORAL HEALTH AND
MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT**

March 10, 2020

POSITION: SUPPORT

The Maryland Coalition to Reform School Discipline (“CRSD”) brings together advocates, service providers, and community members dedicated to transforming school discipline practices within Maryland’s public school systems. We are committed to making discipline responsive to students’ behavioral needs, fair, appropriate to the infraction, and designed to keep youth on track to graduate. **CRSD strongly supports Senate Bill 896**, which would establish the Commission on Student Behavioral Health and Mental Health Treatment (“Commission”). The Commission would, *inter alia*, study treatment and practices for students experiencing behavioral health and mental health issues and make recommendations to improve such practices.

There is a rising mental health crisis among youth. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, “[o]ne in five youth have a mental health condition, with half of mental health conditions developing by age 14.”¹ The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that “ADHD, behavior problems, anxiety, and depression are the most commonly diagnosed mental disorders in children[.]”² Moreover, “[t]he suicide rate for persons aged 10-14 . . . nearly tripled from 2007 to 2017”³ and “[t]he suicide rate for persons aged 15-19 . . . increased 76% from 2007 . . . to 2017”⁴ The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry explains that “[t]he majority of children and adolescents who attempt suicide have a significant mental health disorder, usually depression.”⁵

Thus, these issues are commonplace for our youth, including in Maryland. A survey conducted by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration found that during the 2013-2014 school year, “about 52,000 adolescents aged 12-17 (11.3% of all adolescents) . . . had at least one [major depressive episode] within the year prior to being surveyed.”⁶ Not only are children experiencing their own mental health issues, but they are also witnessing their peers

¹ NAT’L ALLIANCE ON MENTAL ILLNESS MENTAL HEALTH IN SCHOOLS, <https://www.nami.org/Learn-More/Public-Policy/Mental-Health-in-Schools>.

² U.S. DEP’T OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVS. CTRS. FOR DISEASE CONTROL & PREVENTION DATA AND STATISTICS ON CHILDREN’S MENTAL HEALTH, <https://www.cdc.gov/childrensmentalhealth/data.html>.

³ SALLY C. CURTIN, M.A., & MELONIE HERON, Ph.D, U.S. DEP’T OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVS. CTRS. FOR DISEASE CONTROL & PREVENTION NAT’L CTR. FOR HEALTH STATISTICS, DEATH RATES DUE TO SUICIDE AND HOMICIDE AMONG PERSONS AGED 10-24: UNITED STATES, 2000-2017, 2 (October 2019), <https://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/81944>.

⁴ *Id.* at 3.

⁵ AM. ACAD. OF CHILD & ADOLESCENT PSYCHIATRY SUICIDE IN CHILDREN AND TEENS (June 2018), https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Facts_for_Families/FFF-Guide/Teen-Suicide-010.aspx.

⁶ SUBSTANCE ABUSE & MENTAL HEALTH SERVS. ADMIN., BEHAVIOR HEALTH BAROMETER: MARYLAND, 2015, 7 (2015), https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/2015_Maryland_BHBarometer.pdf.

struggling through these issues. A Pew Research Center survey found that “seven-in-ten teens today see [anxiety and depression] as major problems among their peers.”⁷

Despite these crises confronting children, “fewer than half receive any mental health services.”⁸ Thus, it is crucial that schools respond to and address student mental health and behavioral health issues. For many children, schools are the *only* place where they receive support for their mental health and behavioral health challenges. Indeed, of students who receive mental health services, “nearly two[-]thirds do so only in school” and “research has shown that students are more likely to seek counseling when services are available in schools.”⁹ These supports are necessary for students to not only improve their lives, but also to adapt to and thrive in school. The National Association of School Psychologists explains that, “students who receive social-emotional and mental health support achieve better academically.”¹⁰ Conversely, students who are not provided these supports are prone to dropping out of school and engaging in delinquent behavior.¹¹

Several states have adopted laws and initiatives to surface and address student mental health needs. New York enacted a law in 2018 that requires schools to incorporate mental health into the health education curriculum for students in kindergarten through twelve grade.¹² Utah and Oregon allow students to take days off from school for mental health reasons.¹³ In 2019, North Carolina enacted a law that expands mental health services in schools by earmarking funds to hire school psychologists, school counselors, school nurses, and school social workers.¹⁴

SB 896 understands that students need mental health support inside and outside the classroom. The bill recognizes, however, that these mental health challenges are both common and complex. As such, the bill takes the correct steps by calling for a Commission to study and analyze the issues, and then make recommendations to improve the mental health and behavioral health services provided to students. Thus, this bill aims to better help students address these issues, improve their lives, and thrive in school. If enacted, SB 896 will make schools better places for all children, teachers, administrators, and staff.

For these reasons, CRSD strongly supports Senate Bill 896.

⁷ JULIANA MENASCE HOROWITZ & NIKKI GRAF, PEW RESEARCH CTR, MOST U.S. TEENS SEE ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION AS A MAJOR PROBLEM AMONG THEIR PEERS (February 20, 2019), <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2019/02/20/most-u-s-teens-see-anxiety-and-depression-as-a-major-problem-among-their-peers/>.

⁸ NAT’L ALLIANCE ON MENTAL ILLNESS, *supra* note 1.

⁹ NAT’L ASS’N OF SCH. PSYCHOLOGISTS SCHOOL-BASED MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES: IMPROVING STUDENT LEARNING AND WELL-BEING (2016), <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/mental-health/school-psychology-and-mental-health/school-based-mental-health-services>.

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² Sarah DiGiulio, *This Fall, all New York Students Will be Learning About Mental Health*, NBCNEWS.COM (September 23, 2018), <https://www.nbcnews.com/better/health/fall-all-new-york-students-will-be-learning-about-mental-ncna911031>.

¹³ William Wan, *Schools Now Letting Students Stay Home Sick for Mental-Health Days*, THE WASHINGTON POST (October 22, 2019), https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/schools-now-letting-youths-stay-home-sick-for-mental-health-days/2019/10/21/15df339a-e93b-11e9-85c0-85a098e47b37_story.html.

¹⁴ Michael Perchick, *New Law Earmarks Millions Towards Hiring Mental Health Personnel in Public Schools*, WTVD-TV (September 26, 2019), <https://abc11.com/5571577/>.

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BMore Awesome, Inc.

The Choice Program at UMBC

Disability Rights Maryland

Family League of Baltimore

NARAL-Pro-Choice Maryland

Office of the Public Defender

Open Society Institute – Baltimore, University of Maryland School of Social Work

Positive Schools Center

Project HEAL at Kennedy Krieger Institute

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