



Delegate Shane E. Pendergrass, Chair
Delegate Joseline A. Peña-Melnyk, Vice Chair
Health and Government Operations Committee
House Office Building, Room 241
6 Bladen St., Annapolis, MD 21401

House Bill 666 – Workgroup on Screening Related to Adverse Childhood Experiences

Position: SUPPORT

Dear Chair Pendergrass, Vice Chair Peña-Melnyk, and Health and Government Operations Committee Members:

We are writing on behalf of the Maryland School Psychologists' Association (MSPA), a professional organization representing about 500 school psychologists across the state. We advocate for the social-emotional, behavioral, and academic wellbeing of students and families across Maryland.

The purpose of this letter is to provide our support for House Bill 666 – Workgroup on Screening Related to Adverse Childhood Experiences, which is scheduled for hearing on February 26, 2020. This bill establishes a workgroup that will focus on screening for Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). The workgroup will be charged with developing screening tools in collaboration with the Maryland Department of Health, and make recommendations on actions that providers should take following such a screening related to mental health disorders.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention define ACEs simply as potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood. Examples of ACEs include experiencing violence or abuse, witnessing violence in the home or community, having a family member attempt or die by suicide, exposure to substance abuse, and many more. Exposure to ACEs is positively correlated with numerous negative outcomes, including chronic health problems, mental illness, and substance abuse in adulthood. Exposure can also negatively impact educational success and job opportunities. Importantly, early treatment for children exposed to ACEs can guard against many of these negative outcomes.

School psychologists are charged with providing frontline mental health support and treatment to Maryland's students. Unfortunately, we often know little about those students' past experiences, especially as they relate to trauma and ACEs. It is often the case that when students work with their school psychologist, it is the first mental health treatment they have received. Improving ACEs screening as well as ensuring access to early intervention can begin the process of mitigating potential negative outcomes for our students.

MSPA supports House Bill 666 - Workgroup on Screening Related to Adverse Childhood Experiences, and we respectfully urge a favorable vote. If we can provide any additional information, or be of any assistance, please contact us at legislative@mSPAonline.org.

Respectfully submitted,

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Chair, Legislative Committee
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