



February 5, 2020

**House Ways and Means Committee
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 277**

Behavioral Health System Baltimore (BHSB) a nonprofit organization that serves as the local behavioral health authority (LBHA) for Baltimore City. BHSB works to increase access to a full range of quality behavioral health (mental health and substance use) services and advocates for innovative approaches to prevention, early intervention, treatment and recovery for individuals, families, and communities.

Baltimore City represents nearly 35 percent of the public behavioral health system in Maryland, serving nearly 75,000 people with mental illness and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as “behavioral health”) annually.

Behavioral Health System Baltimore supports HB 277- State Department of Education-Guidelines on Trauma-Informed Approach

HB 277 establishes the Trauma-Informed Schools Initiative, a Trauma-Informed Schools Expansion Program, and a Trauma-Informed Expansion Program Fund to advance the practice of trauma-informed approach use in schools and to provide the training and support schools need to become trauma-informed.

BHSB supports HB 277 as we recognize that early childhood and adolescence are comprised of critical windows of opportunity to prevent, treat and heal the impacts of childhood trauma. Research in the fields of neuroscience, molecular biology, public health, genomics, and epigenetics show that traumatic experiences in the first years of life create changes in structure, function and development of the human body that, in turn powerfully influence the person’s physical and mental health over their lifetime. According to the 1998, Adverse Childhood Experiences Study (ACES) the more traumatic experiences also referred to as adverse childhood experiences that a person had the higher a person’s risk for disease and negative social and health behaviors including mental health and substance use disorders.

Child traumatic stress can significantly affect a child’s success in school. According to published research, children who have suffered three or more traumatic experiences are five times more likely to have severe attendance issues and six times more likely to experience behavioral problems. In addition, the 2008 findings by the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, determined that educators who work directly with traumatized children and adolescents are particularly vulnerable to secondary traumatic stress, experiencing burnout, fatigue and other symptoms. However, staff and students can be supported through early recognition of that stress, self-care, and trauma informed support systems.

HB 277 will help schools have a better understanding of trauma-informed approaches and supports necessary to help students that experience childhood trauma. It will also help to increase students’ success by promoting resiliency and an atmosphere of physical, social, and emotional safety. **As such, BHSB urges the House Ways and Means Committee to support HB 277.**