

**Testimony before House Ways and Means Committee
Support with Amendment**

**HB 277 – State Department of Education - Guidelines on Trauma-Informed Approach
February 5, 2020**

Maryland’s Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW-MD), which represents professional social workers across the state, supports House Bill 277 - State Department of Education—Guidelines on Trauma-Informed Approach.

I am writing on behalf of the Social Work in Schools Committee of NASW-MD, which represents and supports School Social Workers throughout the State who are working hard on a daily basis to support both students and staff who are impacted by trauma. We deeply appreciate your awareness of, and support for, our important work.

“Trauma” is a broad term that covers the adverse experiences that touch all of us as we journey through life. Traumatic experiences range from something as relatively common as parental divorce to something as extreme as ongoing childhood sexual abuse or witnessing the murder of a family member. We now know from research that experiences such as these in childhood can cause physical changes in brain physiology, increase the likelihood of incarceration in adulthood, and literally shorten life expectancy. If you are interested in learning about one person’s journey in becoming trauma-informed, I highly recommend the TED Talk of pediatrician Dr. Nadine Burke-Harris, whose practice is in a very challenged neighborhood in Los Angeles.

We also know that trauma affects each person differently. One child may have experienced a life of severe or chronic traumatic events yet prevail, while another could have had only one or two identified adverse experiences and be unable to meet with success in school or in life. The more that the adults interacting with a child work to build their resilience, the better the odds for that child.

For this reason, identifying specific students who have experienced trauma, as outlined in your bill as written, is not likely possible and runs the risk of missing some children or worse, causing inadvertent stigma by singling out those who most need our support. This is why it is important for schools to take a trauma-informed approach with all children, because we can never know who has experienced trauma and who has not, whether a child who is not displaying particular behaviors may have themselves experienced trauma, or whether a particular behavior is the direct response to a trauma or due to some other diagnosable condition.

It is critical that we, as a State, create and support model schools that approach education through universally-implemented trauma-informed practices that are supported by evidence-based approaches. It is critical that we spread these successful practices to all schools. In this way, we can interrupt the “school to prison pipeline,” graduate more young adults who are ready for success in college and careers, and reduce costs for medical and mental health interventions in adulthood.

We strongly support the intent of this bill and encourage the Committee to forward it to the full House for consideration. We also recommend that the Committee amend it to remove the emphasis on identifying and focusing on individual students, and require instead universally-implemented trauma-informed practices in schools.

Gail L. Martin, LCSW-C
Chair, Social Works in Schools Committee
NASW—Maryland Chapter