

**State Department of Education - Guidelines on Trauma-Informed Approach  
House Bill 277**

**Before the House Ways & Means Committee**

**February 5, 2020**

**Position: Support**

The University of Maryland Medical System (“UMMS”) supports House Bill 277. This bill would establish the Trauma-Informed Schools Initiative in the State Department of Education requiring the State Department of Education, in consultation with the Maryland Department of Health and the Department of Human Services, to (1) develop guidelines on a trauma-informed approach, (2) work with stakeholders and content experts to develop training, and (3) offer the training to staff at each local school system.

Traumatic stress can arise from a variety of sources including: experiencing homelessness, witnessing or experiencing violence, bullying, or the like. Children and adults are impacted by traumatic stress. However, the impacts on children are more dramatic and can be long-lasting. Experiencing trauma, especially in childhood, can actually change a person’s brain structure, contributing to long-term physical and behavioral health problems. Children, and adults, often develop coping mechanisms to alleviate the pain of trauma, some of which are classified as “health risk behaviors.” These can include eating unhealthy food, overeating, using tobacco, and misusing and abusing substances. When childhood traumatic stress goes untreated, these coping mechanisms can contribute to anxiety, social isolation, depression, violent response behavior and chronic diseases like hypertension, diabetes and cancer.

Having the tools to help manage traumatic stress benefits all members of a school, and the community at-large, by increasing the understanding of trauma and the subsequent impact. In a trauma-informed school, the adults in the school community including administrators, teachers, staff, parents, and law enforcement are prepared to recognize and respond to those who have been impacted by traumatic stress. Additionally, students are provided with clear expectations and communication strategies to guide them through stressful situations. The goal is not only to provide tools to cope with traumatic situations but to create an underlying culture of respect and support which can be greatly impactful to youth. The beneficial outcomes for students are numerous, including improved student behavior, improved social and emotional skills and better, general, overall well-being.

For these reasons, we urge you to give HB 277 a favorable report.

Respectfully submitted,

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