



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony in Support of HB 466
Higher Education – Student Identification Cards – Required Information

This bill would require that student IDs at Maryland institutions of higher education include the phone number for the state crisis hotline. This would ensure that life-saving information is at a college student's fingertips if they are experiencing a mental health crisis or may be contemplating suicide.

Background

State law already requires that the phone number for Maryland's Helpline, administered by the Maryland Department of Health, be printed on student ID cards for public middle and high schools. This bill would expand that requirement to include institutions of higher education in Maryland.

Several colleges in Maryland, including the University of Maryland College Park and Baltimore County, already include a phone number for a suicide and/or crisis hotline on their student IDs. This bill would ensure that all college IDs include this information.

Several other states have enacted laws to require colleges and universities to include a suicide and/or crisis hotline on student ID cards. Such requirements have passed in California, Kentucky, Washington, and Wisconsin. In all of these states, the respective bills passed with overwhelming bipartisan support.

What This Bill Does

College ID cards would be required to include the phone number for Maryland's Helpline, the state's mental health hotline. Maryland's Helpline is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to callers in need of crisis intervention, risk assessment for suicide, homicide or overdose prevention, support, guidance, information, or connection to community behavioral health providers. It is available by calling 2-1-1 or by texting your zip code to 898-211.

Under the legislation, institutions of higher education may also choose to include on student IDs the phone number for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, the Crisis Text Line, and/or an on-campus crisis center.

The bill would not add additional costs to institutions of higher education, as they would not be required to reprint ID cards in order to comply with the law. Rather, colleges and universities can add the hotline number when new ID cards are printed for incoming freshmen and transfer students.

Suicide Rates are Increasing and Hotlines Can Help

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), suicide is the second leading cause of death among college-age Americans.¹ Unfortunately, suicide rates have increased in Maryland by between 6 to 18 percent over the last twenty years.²

Since its creation in 2013, over 33,500 Marylanders have reached out to the Crisis Text Line for help in times of mental or emotional crisis.³ Roughly one in four people who contacted the Crisis Text Line are college age (18-24 years old) and more than 30% of texts to the hotline are about school.

In spite of these efforts, too many young people in Maryland commit suicide. Between 2003 and 2015, 774 Maryland youth committed suicide.⁴

Thankfully, available research suggests that talking openly about suicide may reduce the risk of suicidal thoughts.⁵ One study funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services found that the vast majority of people who contacted a crisis hotline reported that their hotline intervention stopped them from killing themselves and kept them safe.⁶ Researchers have also found significant decreases in suicidality during the

¹ "WISQARS Leading Causes of Death Reports." CDC, 2017, webappa.cdc.gov/sasweb/ncipc/leadcause.html

² CDC. "Suicide Rising across the US." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 27 Nov. 2018.

³ Crisis Text Line. "Maryland Mental Health." Everybody Hurts, www.stateofmentalhealth.org/maryland

⁴ "Urban–Rural Differences in Suicide in the State of Maryland: The Role of Firearms." Paul S. Nestadt, Patrick Triplett, MD, David R. Fowler, MD, and Ramin Mojtabai, October 2017, American Journal of Public Health 107 (10): 1548-1553.

⁵ "Does asking about suicide and related behaviours induce suicidal ideation? What is the evidence?" Dazzi T, Gribble R, Wessely S, Fear NT. December 2014, Psychological Medicine 44 (16): 3361-3.

⁶ "Follow-up with Callers to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: Evaluation of Callers' Perceptions of Care." Gould, Madelyn S., et al. March 2017, Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior 48 (1): 75-86.

course of the telephone session, with continuing decreases in hopelessness and psychological pain in the weeks following a call.⁷

A seminal study on youth screening programs supports the notion that talking about suicide or publicizing help-seeking information such as hotline numbers does not put the “idea” of suicide in a young person’s head.⁸ On the contrary, the findings suggested that talking openly about suicidal ideation or behavior was beneficial for students with symptoms of depression or who had previously attempted suicide.

Mental Health During the Pandemic

The pandemic and economic crisis have taken a heavy toll on people’s mental health. Increased social isolation, unemployment, income insecurity, and food insecurity have negatively impacted mental health.⁹ To make matters worse, job losses have left many Marylanders without the health insurance needed to cover mental health counseling and treatment during the pandemic.

College-aged Americans have been especially hard hit, according to a CDC survey.¹⁰ Over 25 percent of respondents ages 18-24 reported seriously considering suicide in the previous 30 days; in 2018, this rate was just 11 percent.¹¹ The rate of those considering suicide is especially elevated among young people of color.

The prevalence of depression and anxiety disorders among college students was already a problem before the pandemic. These findings highlight the growing urgency with which we must confront this mental health crisis before more lives are tragically lost.

⁷ “An Evaluation of Crisis Hotline Outcomes Part 2: Suicidal Callers.” Gould, Madelyn S., et al., June 2007, *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior* 37 (3): 338-352.

⁸ “Evaluating Iatrogenic Risk of Youth Suicide Screening Programs.” Gould, Madelyn S., et al. April 2005, *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 293 (13): 1635.

⁹ “The Implications of COVID-19 for Mental Health and Substance Use.” Panchal, Nirmita, et al. April 2020, The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation.

¹⁰ “Mental Health, Substance Use, and Suicidal Ideation during the COVID-19 Pandemic — United States, June 24–30, 2020.” Czeisler, Mark É. August 2020, *CDC Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, vol. 69.

¹¹ “Key Substance Use and Mental Health Indicators in the United States: Results from the 2018 National Survey on Drug Use and Health.” HHS Substance Use and Mental Health Services Administration. Aug 2019.