

Senate Bill 161 Task Force to Study Access to Mental Health Care in Higher Education

Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

January 20, 2021

Position: Support

The Mental Health Association of Maryland is the state's only volunteer, nonprofit citizen's organization that brings together consumers, families, professionals, advocates and concerned citizens for unified action in all aspects of mental health and mental illness. We appreciate this opportunity to again submit testimony in support of Senate Bill 161.

SB 161 seeks to establish a task force to study the policies and procedures of mental health care in higher education and recommend ways to reduce costs and barriers to providing access to mental health services for these students.

The Johns Hopkins School of Medicine states that one in four Americans struggle with a diagnosable mental health problem, many of which may arise during ages 18 – 24. The American Council on Education's Higher Education Blog notes that, "recent survey data indicate that in the past year, three out of five students experienced overwhelming anxiety, and two out of five students were too depressed to function." They indicate that only 10 – 15% of these students ever make it to their college campus counseling centers, underscoring the need to reevaluate how we offer mental health services to students in higher education.¹

The Covid-19 pandemic has intensified this need. A recent study of over 18,000 students at 14 colleges reports that 60% have indicated that the pandemic has made it harder for them to access mental health care. Six percent said they had experienced race-based discrimination as a result of the pandemic, and 41% reported witnessing race-based discrimination (online or in person). Students also reported that anxiety and depression were impairing their academics at higher rates than before the pandemic.² SB 161 calls for the creation of a task force to, among other things, "examine the challenges for institutions of higher education in meeting the demand for mental health services," and, "make recommendations regarding...the use of telemedicine and video conferencing." This past year demonstrates that there is an even greater need to act on this.

¹ Roy, Nance. "The Rise of Mental Health on College Campuses: Protecting the Emotional Health of Our Nation's College Students," *Higher Education Blog*, December 18, 2018.

² The Healthy Minds Network & American College Health Association. "The Impact of Covid-19 on College Student Well-Being," July, 2020. https://healthymindsnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Healthy_Minds_NCHA_COVID_Survey_Report_FINAL.pdf

For more information contact:

Margo Quinlan, Director of Youth & Older Adult Policy: 410-236-5488 / mquinlan@mhamd.org

MHAMD supports the development of a Task Force to Study Access to Mental Health Care in Higher Education and would welcome the opportunity to serve on this task force. It is vital that we have the appropriate services and mental health care models on campuses across our state in order to meet the diverse needs of students.