



February 3, 2021

**House Ways and Means Committee
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT**

HB 496 Primary and Secondary Education-Mental Health Services- Expansion (Counselors Not Cops Act)

Behavioral Health System Baltimore (BHSB) is 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 over 77,000 people with mental illness and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as “behavioral health”) annually.**

Behavioral Health System Baltimore is pleased to support HB 496- Primary and Secondary Education-Mental Health Services- Expansion (Counselors Not Cops Act). This bill alters the membership of the School Safety Subcabinet Advisory Board and requires the Governor to include \$10 million to the Safe Schools Fund to be used for the purpose of expanding availability of school mental health services beginning in fiscal year 2023.

BHSB supports HB 496 as we recognize mental illness and substance use among children are important behavioral health issues that significantly impact children, families, and communities. Behavioral health conditions children and youth experience can tie into major problems found in schools such as chronic absence, low achievement, disruptive behavior and dropping out. Early Intervention and increased access to behavioral health services in Maryland schools will provide many students with the resources needed to achieve academic success.

In addition, 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. Students can be supported through early recognition of that stress, self-care, and trauma informed support systems.

HB 496 will 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 pass HB 496.**