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Senate Bill 548 Public Schools - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Surveys - Revisions

Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

February 25, 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 submit testimony in support of Senate Bill 548.

SB 548 seeks to require MSDE to establish procedures for administering the Youth Risk Behavior Survey/Youth Tobacco Survey (YRBS/YTS), repeal the authority of MSDE to omit certain survey questions, and requires MSDE to include questions related to adverse childhood experiences and positive childhood experiences. The bill would also require MDH to publish a state and county level data summary and trends report within 6 months of receiving CDC YRBS data on Adverse Childhood Experiences and Positive Childhood Experiences.

The Maryland YRBS/YTS is conducted biennially by MDH and MSDE. It collects survey level data on mental health, such as suicide and depression, substance use and tobacco use, and risk behaviors such as personal safety, bullying and violence, and nutrition and physical activity. The Maryland YRBS/YTS includes several Adverse Childhood Experience, or ACE, questions as well, helping to show a strong relationship when it comes to exposure to ACEs and engagement in youth risk behaviors, as well as other social, emotional and behavioral challenges.

According to the 2018-2019 High School YRBS/YTS, about 1 in 2 Maryland High School students were exposed to measured ACEs. The more ACEs students are exposed to, the more likely they are to be engaged in certain risk behavior. These ACEs have been found to have a direct impact on the normative development and lifelong health of individuals, as trauma can affect a child's brain and delay certain development which can make it harder for the child to concentrate and study. ACEs include extreme poverty, family problems, experiencing or witnessing violence, abuse and discrimination; all of these can be extremely traumatic for children. ACEs are a significant risk factor for mental health and substance use disorders and can impact prevention efforts.

By prohibiting MSDE from omitting critical questions on the YRBS/YTS, and including in the survey all tiers and questions in the CDC YRBS on Adverse Childhood Experiences and Positive Childhood Experiences, the Maryland Department of Health may begin to publish a more robust report on the challenges faced by our state's middle and high school students. This data is extremely important in supporting the allocation of resources and treatment interventions, understanding in which counties and regions of our state children are facing higher rates of ACEs, and overall supporting young people in their development.

MHAMD supports the goals and intents of this bill and urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 548.

For more information contact:

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