

**RE: SUPPORT of Senate Bill 405**  
**(Higher Education - Student Identification Cards - Required Information)**

February 25, 2021

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Chair Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan, and Committee Members:

My name is Susan Maskaleris and I live in Waldorf, Maryland. I am the Advocacy/Public Policy Chair with the Maryland Chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP-MD). I lost my father, a retired Air Force firefighter, to suicide when I was 14 years old. I live with a mental health condition, depression.

Thank you for the opportunity to share testimony in support of **Senate Bill 405**, which requires each institution of higher education to print the telephone number of Maryland's Helpline on student identification cards and authorizes institutions to also include telephone numbers of other mental health crisis hotlines.

According to the University of Maryland University Health Center, "suicide is reported as the second leading cause of death among college students, but it is preventable. The majority of college students who experience suicidal ideation also experience some form of mental health concern or distress, most commonly depression. The most effective way to prevent suicide is to identify the warning signs, intervene as appropriate, and refer to campus resources."

A recent study sponsored by the American College Counseling Association reported that less than 20% of students who died by suicide accessed their school's counseling center as a resource. This suggests a need for colleges and universities to increase awareness of the mental health programs and resources that are available for students who may be struggling. All students need the knowledge and tools to better recognize suicide risk in themselves and in their peers and to know where and how to seek help.

An American College Health Association-National College Health Assessment (ACHA-NCHA) survey of more than 67,000 students across 108 institutions assessing mental health diagnoses and suicidality among undergraduate students revealed the following findings:

- One in five students (20%) have had thoughts of suicide, with 9% making an attempt and nearly 20% reporting self-injury.
- One in four students (25%) reported being diagnosed with a mental illness.
- Rates of stressful life events were high and associated with mental health issues.
- Sexual minorities showed elevated rates of mental health disorders and suicidality or self-injury. Transgender students showed particularly elevated rates of all outcomes, with approximately two-thirds reporting self-injury and more than one-third attempting suicide.
- Mental health issues are underreported and undertreated for racial or ethnic minorities.

Lifesaving information, such as how to access crisis intervention hotlines, mental health programs, and suicide prevention resources should be easily accessible by all students and faculty. Initiatives like HB 466 create more transparency with students and parents and increase the likelihood that students will connect with the services they need. Transparency and easily accessible information can reduce the stigma surrounding mental health and reinforce the notion that it is a sign of strength to seek help.

AFSP is the leading national not-for-profit organization exclusively dedicated to saving lives and bringing hope to those affected by suicide. We firmly believe that attention and commitment to suicide prevention within higher education can save young lives across Maryland.

Members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee, the AFSP Maryland Chapter is grateful for your consideration of SB 405 and for working with your colleagues and other agencies to address the suicide rate among our college and university community. We all have a role to play in preventing suicide, and with your support, passage of this legislation will affirm the state's commitment to improving the lives of Maryland's young people and their loved ones and to prevent the tragic loss of life to suicide in the future. We urge a favorable report on SB 405. Please feel free to contact me at [smaskaleris@gmail.com](mailto:smaskaleris@gmail.com) or 301-751-8781 with any questions or if you would like additional information.