

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

February 25, 2021

Dorothy A. Kaplan, Ph.D.  
Board of Directors  
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, Maryland Chapter (AFSP-MD)  
Home Address: 10216 Garden Way, Potomac, Maryland 20854  
Phone: (301) 335-1954; E-mail: [dannekaplan@gmail.com](mailto:dannekaplan@gmail.com)

Chair Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan, and Committee Members:

My name is Dr. Dorothy Kaplan and I live in Potomac, Maryland. I am a licensed psychologist in Maryland and a Board member with the Maryland Chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP-MD). I began my career as a college professor and treated college students with psychological health conditions when I was in private practice in Bethesda, MD. I lost my mother and uncle to suicide when I was a graduate student and my grandfather to the same cause some ten years earlier. I supported my oldest daughter during her college years when she struggled with a life-threatening mental health condition accompanied by suicidal thoughts and behaviors.

Thank you for the opportunity to share testimony in support of **Senate Bill 405**.

The college years represent a period of increased vulnerability for a wide range of mental health (MH) challenges including suicidal thoughts and behaviors. Many students enter college with preexisting mental health challenges. Use of alcohol and other drugs may exacerbate mood disturbances and increase the risk for suicide.

Tragically, suicide is the second most common cause of death among college students. College students face unprecedented levels of stress that affect their mental health. In addition to increased academic demands, adjusting to a new environment, and developing a new support system during this transition, college students now have the added stress of COVID-19. Research has shown that college students are experiencing increased stress and anxiety due to COVID-19 (**Effects of COVID-19 on College Students' Mental Health in the United States: Interview Survey Study**).

A study of the first six months of the pandemic (**COVID-19 and Mental Health: How America's High School and College Students are Coping during the Pandemic**) found that:

- More than ½ of all students were worried about their mental health.

- Half of all students reported experiencing anxiety, 1/3 reported experiencing depression, and almost a ¼ said they knew of someone with suicidal thoughts.

Whereas these statistics are alarming, there is also some cause to be optimistic about suicide prevention. The study also found that:

- More than ½ of all students have offered support to a friend whom they thought was struggling.
- More than ¾ of students who sought counseling from their school found it extremely, very, or moderately helpful.

If a young person can get through the intense, and short, moment of active suicidal crisis and access suicide prevention services, chances are they will not die by suicide. Printing the numbers of local crisis helplines on student ID cards ensures easy access to mental health providers and helps to reduce the stigma of reaching out for psychological support. It makes it easier for a student to help a friend in response to a late-night text and increases the likelihood that the student will connect with the services they need at the time of need.

Members of the Appropriations Committee, the AFSP Maryland Chapter is grateful for your consideration of SB 405 and we urge a favorable report on SB405. Please feel free to contact me at [dannekaplan@gmail.com](mailto:dannekaplan@gmail.com) or 301-335-1954 with any questions or if you need additional information.