



TO: The Honorable Paul G. Pinsky, Chair  
Members, Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee  
The Honorable Malcolm Augustine

FROM: Pamela Metz Kasemeyer  
J. Steven Wise  
Danna L. Kauffman

DATE: February 25, 2021

RE: **SUPPORT** – Senate Bill 548 – *Public Schools – Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Surveys – Revisions*

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The Maryland Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (MDAAP) is a statewide association representing more than 1,100 pediatricians and allied pediatric and adolescent healthcare practitioners in the State and is a strong and established advocate promoting the health and safety of all the children we serve. On behalf of MDAAP, we submit this letter of **support** for Senate Bill 548.

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) currently administers the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) to public middle school and high school students. Senate Bill 548 would require that the version of the survey administered to Maryland students include all CDC questions from the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and Positive Childhood Experiences module. It would also require that the Maryland Department of Health publish a state and county-level data summary and trends report within 6 months after receiving the data. Finally, it would remove language that permits MSDE to omit up to one-third of YRBS questions that they believe are "inappropriate."

There is significant scientific evidence demonstrating that ACEs have been shown to increase the risk for adverse physical and mental health during adolescence and adulthood. Exposure to ACEs and other adversities can lead to underperformance in school and employment, poor mental health, substance abuse, and chronic physical health problems. The inclusion of the CDC's questions on ACEs and Positive Childhood Experiences in the YRBS serves multiple purposes. It will provide information about the extent of our youth's exposure to ACEs. Data collected over multiple years can be used to assess whether prevention efforts are reducing ACEs. In addition, ACE data can provide information about communities where ACEs are most prevalent, enabling effective distribution of resources and services to communities at greatest need. Inclusion of questions in the YRBS on Positive Childhood Experiences also enables us to examine the potential ameliorative effects of positive experiences, such as having supportive adults available outside the home.

In 2018, Maryland was one of two states to pilot the inclusion of ACE questions in the YRBS, enabling a successful test run of inclusion of ACE questions. Only four ACEs were included in the pilot – emotional abuse, household substance abuse, household mental illness, and household incarceration. Yet these four questions provided valuable information to policymakers. For example, the data below showed that emotional abuse is common among Maryland teenagers.

The inclusion of the full complement of ACE questions and questions on Positive Childhood Experiences required by Senate Bill 548 would provide additional valuable data to Maryland citizens and policymakers and will enable the data to be used to target prevention and treatment services and to track the success of interventions. For the reasons stated, a favorable report is requested.

**For more information call:**

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