



Karen B. Salmon, Ph.D.
State Superintendent of Schools

BILL: House Bill 783 **DATE:** February 23, 2021

SUBJECT: Workgroup on Screening Related to Adverse Childhood Experiences **COMMITTEE:** Health and Government Operations

POSITION: Information Only

CONTACT: Zachary Hands
410-767-0504 (Annapolis)
Zachary.hands1@maryland.gov

EXPLANATION:

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) is providing information for consideration regarding House Bill (HB) 783 which specifies that a workgroup shall be established on screening related to adverse childhood experiences. The State Superintendent of Schools, or the State Superintendent’s designee is required to be a member of this workgroup and would be required to appoint certain members to the workgroup. One of the tasks of the workgroup will be to recommend changes to the physical examination form that the State Department of Education requires of all new students entering a public school, including requiring that a physical examination include an assessment of trauma.

The effect of this legislation will impact families in a very personal way by asking about trauma including, but not limited to: abuse (physical, verbal, and sexual), emotional neglect, parental issues such as alcohol use, domestic violence, a family member in jail, or diagnosed with a mental illness, and other issues such as divorce, death, or abandonment can re-traumatize families. Having these questions asked on a form that is required for entry into school could be a violation of privacy. Should a family need mental health support, school staff including school counselors, school psychologists, school nurses, pupil personnel workers, and school social workers are there to support them.

Currently, House Bill 277 of 2020 requires the MSDE, in consultation with the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) and the Maryland Department of Human Services (MDHS), to develop guidelines on a trauma-informed approach that will assist schools with implementing a comprehensive trauma-informed policy, the identification of a student, teacher, or staff member who has experienced trauma, the appropriate manner for responding to a student, teacher or staff member who has experienced trauma, and becoming a trauma-informed school. For schools participating in the Handle With Care program, the guidelines must establish the appropriate manner for responding to a student who is identified as a “handle with care” student. Through the legislation passed in 2020 surrounding the Trauma-Informed Approach, the MSDE is responsible for distributing the guidelines to each local school system and publishing the guidelines on the MSDE website.

Using federal grant resources, the MSDE is currently working to provide training and technical assistance to local school systems in initiatives such as trauma-informed approaches, mental health first aid, restorative approaches, and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS) to address the mental health needs of students and improve overall school climate. Upon release of the guidelines, the MSDE will continue to work with school systems to integrate these initiatives to create and enhance a trauma-informed environment in schools.

The Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) requires mental health supports for students, which are currently being provided by local school systems. Student support staff are available in all Maryland schools. Student services personnel, including school counselors, school psychologists, pupil personnel, school social workers, and school nurses are required under COMAR 13A.05.05 to provide a program of coordinated student services that focuses on a student's health, personal, interpersonal, academic, and career development. School counselors and school psychologists in particular are required to enhance awareness of mental health and promote positive, healthy behaviors (COMAR 13A.05.05.02 – *School Counseling Program*) and provide direct educational, behavioral, and mental health services for children and youth as well as work with families, school administrators, educators, and other professionals to create supportive learning and social environments for all students (COMAR 13A.05.05.04 – *School Psychology Program*).

Strategies such as classroom lessons on managing stress, dealing with conflict, and other mental health challenges are provided by student support staff in schools. Health education provides students with the opportunity to learn about mental health strategies and discuss concerns. Social and emotional learning skills are taught by classroom teachers across the State. Restorative and mindfulness practices, such as circles, and mindfulness spaces, are being implemented in many schools across the State. These practices provide students with strategies to self-manage stress and to develop community and peer support. More than 7,000 members of school staff including teachers, administrators, bus drivers, cafeteria staff, and other school staff have been trained by the MSDE and local school systems to look for warning signs of mental health distress and how to refer students and families for help. The MSDE and local school systems are continuing to provide training to a variety of staff to address student mental health needs.

We respectfully request that you consider this information as you deliberate **HB 783**. For further information, please contact Zachary Hands, at 410-767-0504, or zachary.hands1@maryland.gov.