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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
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Testimony in Support of HB461 - Public Schools – Student Attendance – Excused Absences for Mental Health Needs

HB461 allows Maryland students to take mental health days as an excused absence. Students will be permitted to take one excused mental health day per quarter, without the need for a note from a doctor.

It is no secret that mental illness remains an enormous problem among this current generation of students. Over 70% of teens say that anxiety and depression are major issues among their peers.

Even more concerning, 17% of Maryland students seriously consider suicide. That is roughly one out of every six of our children who are having to go into the classroom carrying this immense mental and emotional burden. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) says suicide is the third leading cause of death for Maryland youth.

As our students start coming back into the classroom in the next year, they will also be carrying the physical and emotional trauma of the COVID-19 pandemic with them. Many of our students have fallen ill or have had a loved one pass away as a result of the virus. This legislation becomes essential to ensure our students have every resource at their disposal to take care of their mental health.

Other States, such as Oregon and Utah, have implemented similar measures in recent years. Maryland needs to take this necessary step to ensure our students' mental health needs are met – and to ensure we are treating mental health and physical health with the same degree of seriousness.

This bill does not aim to solve the issue of mental illness among our youth, but simply seeks to alleviate some of their daily anxiety by giving our students a small reprieve every quarter when they need it.

For these reasons, I respectfully ask for a favorable report on HB461.