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House Bill 824 Public Schools - Cyber Safety Guide and Training Course - Development, Implementation, and Reporting
House Ways and Means Committee
February 12, 2021
Position: Support

The Mental Health Association of Maryland is the state's only volunteer, nonprofit citizen's organization that brings together consumers, families, professionals, advocates and concerned citizens for unified action in all aspects of mental health and mental illness. We appreciate this opportunity to submit testimony in support of House Bill 824.

HB 824 seeks to require the State Department of Education, the Behavioral Health Administration within the Maryland Department of Health, the Maryland Center for School Safety, and the Department of Information Technology jointly to develop and publish a cyber safety guide and training course to be implemented in public schools. This is aimed at leveraging best practices to prevent and reduce instances of cyber bullying and harassment, with information and guidance for students in third through twelfth grades, parents, and school employees who interact with students. MHAMD supports this approach, as the US Department of Education and the Department of Health and Human Services similarly state that the most effective measures to reduce the incidences and impacts of cyberbullying often include the entire school community.[1]

Cyberbullying impacts students on both ends of the relationship – research has shown that victims of cyberbullying report increased depressive affect, anxiety, loneliness, and suicidal behavior, and perpetrators also experience increased instances of substance use and aggression.[2] Cyberbullying also serves to further isolate already marginalized students: GLSEN's 2019 National School Climate Survey reports that almost 50% of TLGBQ students experienced electronic harassment, and demonstrates that TLGBQ students who reported more severe victimization regarding their sexual orientation or gender expression had lower levels of self-esteem and higher levels of depression than those who reported less severe victimization.[3]

The American Academy of Pediatrics suggests caregivers engage in open discussions with young children and adolescents about their online behavior, and to actively participate in implementing

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[1] StopBullying.gov., *Facts About Bullying.* https://www.stopbullying.gov/resources/facts
[2] Nixon, C. *Current perspectives: The impact of cyberbullying on adolescent health.* Adolescent Health, Medicine and Therapeutics, 2014. www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4126576/#b100-ahmt-5-143
[3] Kosciw, J., Clark, C., Truong, N., & Zongrone, A., *The 2019 National School Climate Survey The Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Youth in Our Nation's Schools.* GLSEN, 2019. https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/2020-11/NSCS19-111820.pdf

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safeguards to protect youth from engaging in cyberbullying behaviors.[4] By taking a wraparound approach in mandating training components for students, parents and school employees, HB 824 is following recommended guidelines and practices to create a standard of training which might best support Maryland students.

The Mental Health Association of Maryland supports the goals and intents of this bill and urges a favorable report on House Bill 824.

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[4] Schurgin O'Keeffe, G., Clarke-Pearson. K., *Council on Communications and Media Clinical report – the impact of social media on children, adolescents, and families.* Pediatrics, 2011.
https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/127/4/800