

February 3, 2021

**House Bill 496 – Primary and Secondary Education - Mental Health Services - Expansion (Counselors Not Cops Act)- SUPPORT**

Chair Kaiser, Vice Chair Washington, and members of the Ways & Means Committee,

The National Alliance on Mental Illness, Maryland and our 11 local affiliates across the state represent a statewide network of more than 45,000 families, individuals, community-based organizations and service providers. NAMI Maryland is dedicated to providing education, support and advocacy for persons with mental illnesses, their families and the wider community.

NAMI believes that public and private elementary, middle and high schools should provide and/or facilitate the provision of appropriate mental health services to Maryland's children. **HB 496** would expand school based behavioral health by providing \$10 million/yr in grant funding to schools, for the purpose of contracting with behavioral health experts and community liaisons, to provide wraparound behavioral health services for Maryland's youth. NAMI supports these provisions in the bill as well as provisions regarding data collection required in administrating this new grant program. Collection and analysis of these data points referred to in the bill, will help identify other gaps in school based behavioral health services.

Nationally, one in five youth have a mental health condition, with half of mental health conditions developing by age 14. Yet, less than half of youth with mental health conditions received any kind of treatment in the past year. Undiagnosed, untreated, and inadequately treated mental illnesses significantly interfere with a student's ability to learn, to grow, and to develop. Since children spend much of their productive time in educational settings, schools provide a unique opportunity to identify and treat mental health conditions by serving students where they already are.

**How We Talk About It:**

- Many mental health conditions first appear in youth and young adults, with 50% of all conditions developing by age 14 and 75% by age 24.
- 1 in 5 youth have a mental health condition, but sadly fewer than half receive any mental health services.
- The earlier a young person can access mental health care, the more effective it can be. Early treatment can help keep youth in school and on track to achieving their life goals.
- But, far too often, there are long delays between when a young person first experiences symptoms and when they get help.
- NAMI supports funding to allow schools to train faculty and staff on the early warning signs of mental health conditions and how to link students to services.
- And, NAMI believes that every school should also be able to provide school-based and/or school-linked mental health services. School-based mental health services bring trained community mental health professionals into schools, where school-linked mental health services link families to resources in the community.
- Schools should also have the funding necessary to coordinate school-based mental health services with the community mental health system so children and young adults do not fall through the cracks.
- Investing in children's mental health improves the lives of children and families. When children get the right care at the right time, we can prevent negative outcomes like school failure, hospitalization—and even suicide.

For these reasons, NAMI Maryland asks for a favorable report on **HB 496**.

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