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House Bill 613 Public Schools - Appropriations for School Safety Expenditures - Increase

Appropriations Committee

March 8, 2021

Position: Oppose

The Mental Health Association of Maryland is a nonprofit education and advocacy organization that brings together consumers, families, clinicians, advocates, and concerned citizens for unified action in all aspects of mental health, mental illness, and substance use. We appreciate this opportunity to present this **testimony in opposition to House Bill 613**.

HB 613 increases from \$10 million to \$20 million certain annual appropriations in order to expand law enforcement and school resource officers in Maryland public schools.

Last year, MHAMD testified in support of legislation that would have redirected funding for school resource officers to school-based mental health services, restorative justice programming, wraparound services, and trauma-informed approaches in public schools across the state. HB 613 flies in the face of these more appropriate, data-based approaches for improving student outcomes and school safety.

In the wake of high-profile school shootings, school districts across the country have invested scarce educational funds into putting more police in schools. However, there is no reliable evidence that school police keep students and educators safe. Alternately, educators, researchers, and law enforcement have found that strategies to support students' positive behavior and strengthen relationships among students, staff and parents *are* effective for keeping schools safe.

Today's students are experiencing increased levels of depression and anxiety and many forms of trauma. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the suicide rate among children ages 10 to 17 increased by 70 percent between 2006 and 2016, a situation that has just been exacerbated by the COVID pandemic. Further, approximately 72 percent of children in the United States will have experienced at least one major stressful event — such as witnessing violence, experiencing abuse, or experiencing the loss of a loved one — before the age of 18.

School counselors, nurses, social workers, and psychologists are frequently the first to see children who are sick, stressed, or traumatized — especially in communities with high poverty levels. The benefits of investing in mental health services are clear: schools with such services see improved attendance rates, better academic achievement, and higher graduation rates, as well as lower rates of suspension, expulsion, and other disciplinary incidents.

Data shows that the presence of school-based mental health providers - not increased law enforcement - improves outcomes for students and can also improve overall school safety. For this reason, **MHAMD strongly opposes HB 613 and urges an unfavorable report.**

For more information, please contact Derrell Frazier at (443) 854-1413