

March 11, 2022

**Committee:** Appropriations

**Testimony on:** HB1029 – Access to Mental Health Advisory Committee – Establishment

**Position:** Favorable

RE: Testimony in support of HB1029 (Access to Mental Health Advisory Committee – Establishment)

Chairs McIntosh, Vice Chair Chang, and members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Lily-Max Cooke and I currently serve as the Director of Government Affairs within the University of Maryland's Student Government Association (SGA). On behalf of our student body, I am urging a favorable vote on HB1029.

Mental health is a crucial part of overall physical well being among all students. It is no secret that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the mental health crisis across the nation, particularly those facing housing insecurity and low-income financial circumstances, and those under the age of 25. Attending an institute of higher education opens plenty of open doors for many, yet for others the costs that occur when being a full-time or part-time student can place grave financial stressors on the mental and physical health of the individual. This is even more true for those students who enter a college or university with pre-existing difficult circumstances.

Mental health access is a key component of a student's experience at a higher education institution. The uncertainty of if or when those services may be needed require consistent, effective care access on behalf of a university. Mental health care requires not only easy accessibility, but culturally competent professionals who are able to assist a diverse student body. From an administrative lens, in order to provide the best care to students, continuous reporting, oversight, and accountability measures must be in place to readily adapt to changing circumstances. For these reasons, HB1029 solves those gaps and implements a long-standing advisory committee to identify the best models, examine challenges, and make evidence-based recommendations to USM institutions.

This bill addresses key concerns in mental health care. A continuous long-standing model is the only way to effectively introduce the best solutions to students in need. I cannot stress enough the importance of a longstanding committee, one that has the resources and capabilities to consult with the individual needs of each USM institution, tailoring methods and recommendations to those needs. USM institutions are diverse in their makeup of students, size, location, and other factors; yet are similar in that mental health crises do not discriminate, and can affect any student at any point of time. Tailored recommendations and a deep look at specific challenges will assist universities in the way they tackle mental health access and care, allowing for comprehensive plans to best serve those in need of treatment.

I kindly urge the committee to vote favorably on this bill.

*The University of Maryland, Student Government Association* supports HB1029 establishing the Access to Mental Health Advisory Committee in Higher Education. This bill is important because it prioritizes

mental health in college aged students and maximizes the state's return on investment in University System of Maryland (USM) Institutions. HB1029 will:

- Establish a standing committee to examine challenges University System of Maryland (USM) Institutions face in meeting demands for mental health services
- Identify the best models for accessing mental health services
- Make recommendations regarding ways to reduce costs and barriers to mental health services.
- Create a resource for USM Institutions, their student bodies, and legislators to utilize when examining mental health in higher education institutions.

I request a favorable vote on HB1029.

Sincerely,

Lily-Max Cooke