



## **HB 1029 – Maryland Higher Education Commission – Access to Mental Health Advisory Committee – Establishment**

**Committee: Appropriations**

**Date: March 13, 2022**

**POSITION: Support**

**The Maryland Coalition of Families:** Maryland Coalition of Families (MCF) helps families who care for a loved one with behavioral health needs. Using personal experience, our staff provide one-to-one peer support and navigation services to family members with a child, youth or adult with a mental health, substance use or gambling issue.

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MCF enthusiastically supports HB 1029.

HB 1029 would establish an Advisory Committee to study access to mental health care in institutions of higher education. The Advisory Committee will be directed to study such things as the challenges colleges and universities are having in meeting the demand for mental health services; barriers to implementing counseling services; and best practice models, including the use of telehealth. Then the Council is to make a number of recommendations.

Across the country, colleges and universities are facing a huge increase in the number of students who need mental health care. A national survey of college students in 2020 found that nearly 40 percent reported experiencing depression; over 30 percent reported having anxiety; and 14% said they'd thought about suicide in the last year. In a survey of directors of college counseling centers in 2020, nearly 90% reported that the demand for their services had gone up in the previous year – and this was the year prior to the onset of the COVID pandemic. We know that COVID has negatively impacted the mental health of the entire nation, hitting youth and young adults particularly hard. A survey conducted by the CDC in June of 2020 revealed that 25% of young adults aged 18-24 had considered suicide.

Colleges and universities are struggling to meet this demand for mental health counselling.

MCF has a young adult group, Taking Flight. In the course of working with these young adults, I have heard many troubling stories about difficulties accessing mental health care. A few years ago, the Active Minds chapter of the University of Maryland College Park participated in a

campaign to protest the lengthy waits that existed to see a counselor on campus. There were reports of individuals having to wait months to secure an appointment. The campaign was entitled “Thirty Days too Late.”

I’ve also heard reports of students who got in to see a college counsellor, only to be told that they were only allowed three - five visits before they had to secure a private counsellor off-campus. Many students do not have the resources to do this, and/or they don’t want to tell their parents, and/or they don’t have access to transportation to go off-campus. While the use of off-campus counsellors may be one way to address the struggles that college campuses are having keeping up with demand, this approach needs to be undertaken in a thoughtful way that is supportive of the needs of students.

An Advisory Council is critically needed to look at all of these pressing issues.

While I’ve heard concerning stories, I’ve also heard of great success stories from young people who were able to access robust student counselling services. Clearly there is much benefit to being able to provide timely and quality mental health services to students.

Therefore we urge a favorable report on HB 1029.

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