

March 11, 2022

Committee: Appropriations

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

Position: Favorable

RE: Testimony supporting HB1029 (Access to Mental Health Advisory Committee – Establishment)

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

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 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.

As a student at the University of Maryland, College Park, I support HB1029. Over the last decade, counseling centers across the nation have experienced a consistent increase in the demand for mental health services. These numbers have only increased with the pandemic. Looking at the University of Maryland, College Park, between 2016-2019, the Counseling Center saw a 26% increase in students seeking mental health services. As our services stand, there is not enough support to meet the demand of student's needs. Speaking as a student who struggles with mental health, booking a counseling appointment is extremely difficult. I was told due to high demand, appointments are released in batches every two weeks. I was instructed to wake up at 8 am, and call the counseling center line again and again, until they pick up. Ultimately, I did not get an appointment. Though I was able to locate outside resources, not every student can do this given their struggles. The system as it stands is a barrier to students seeking help, especially to students facing impacts of mental health problems.

Establishing the standing Mental Health Committee as described in the bill would be an essential step towards lowering these barriers to access. This bill allows for recommendations that would outfit our mental health services with the resources necessary to help students across the state of Maryland. This is essential, especially following the two years of collective trauma students faced throughout the pandemic.

I request a favorable vote on HB1029.

Sincerely,

Caroline Thorne, University of Maryland - College Park, cthorne@terpmail.umd.edu