

Members of the House's Appropriations Committee,

My name is Kyle Dineen and I'm the Co-Director of Government Relations on the University System of Maryland Student Council (USMSC) along with Farah Helal.

I am writing to express my support of HB1029 titled Maryland Higher Education Commission-Access to Mental Health Advisory Committee- Establishment.

During the 2020-21 academic year, I served as the Executive Chair of MHEC's Student Advisory Council and oversaw all student-led policy recommendations. Consistently, the issues of mental health awareness, access, and availability were brought before the advisory council; yet our role and scope of practice often prevented us from specifically focusing on the mental health agenda that was being discussed throughout the state. It is well known that the students in need of mental health services are underserved and under supported across the University System of Maryland. While our schools care deeply about this area of student wellbeing, the provider shortage and other logistical problems related to mental healthcare continue to exist. Legislative efforts, like those described in HB1029 are sincerely needed.

During the USMSC meetings held this academic year, each one of our regents schools have reinforced the need for greater improvement and support for mental health. It is a primary student issue of great concern, one that has been discussed for several years without remedy. Our student representatives consistently explain how there is a shortage of counselors, unbelievably long waiting periods for appointments (sometimes over an academic semester), and a lack of sufficient mental health services for vulnerable student populations. The creation of an MHEC advisory committee, specifically dedicated to mental health access within our education systems, will allow for more effective dialogue and for pragmatic solutions to be provided to the state on behalf of our students.

For these reasons, I offer my personal recommendation for the members of the Appropriations Committee to support HB1029.

Sincerely,  
Kyle Dineen