

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

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

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

MaryPIRG Student Climate Action Coalition supports HB1029 establishing the Access to Mental Health Advisory Committee in Higher Education. 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.

MSCAC aims to represent college students across the state and advocate for meaningful climate action, environmental justice, and to empower youth. We are a 100% student-run group with more than 300 active supporters and have representation from most Maryland public universities - including University of Maryland College Park, University of Maryland Baltimore Campus, University of Maryland Eastern Shore, University of Maryland Baltimore, Morgan State University, Salisbury University, Frostburg State University, Towson University, University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science, and St. Mary's College of Maryland. Our members have personally felt the effects of climate change in our state - from flooding of homes and destruction of livelihoods in Ellicott City, to heat waves in Baltimore, to the exacerbation of allergies and asthma, to increased heat-related illnesses, and to seeing the harm caused to the Chesapeake Bay ecosystem in our backyards.

Climate anxiety is something that we experience. As young people, the impacts of climate change fall on our shoulders and we bear this unique and unfair burden. ¹ In 2017 the American Psychological Association published a study detailing the mental health implications of climate change, climate disasters, and overwhelming failure to address climate change. ² They list acute mental health impacts include increases in trauma and shock, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), compounded stress, anxiety, substance abuse, and depression. They note that these impacts are not equally dispersed, certain populations are more vulnerable to the health-related

¹ <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Vfq85d0Epg7PL3gDme1ko8IILQJZ1CUEI2iOeqaUKL8/edit?usp=sharing>

² https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1irrOF1gG5RFu_atNWMNm42BA9Gp-d0V

impacts of climate change. They summarize that “factors that may increase sensitivity to the mental health impacts include geographic location, presence of pre-existing disabilities or chronic illnesses, and socioeconomic and demographic inequalities, such as education level, income, and age. In particular, stress from climate impacts can cause children to experience changes in behavior, development, memory, executive function, decision-making, and scholastic achievement.”

Climate change impacts our health in more ways than one. The reality and fear of lackluster action despite increasingly terrifying and dangerous changes to our climate puts a burden on young people, including students. Climate anxiety can compound on other mental health disorders that students have. According to the Association for University and College Counseling Center Directors, “Anxiety is the top presenting concern among college students (41.6 percent), followed by depression (36.4 percent) and relationship problems (35.8 percent).”

³ Additionally, directors report that over 20% of students present “severe mental health concerns” while another 40% present mild mental health concerns. ⁴

As a coalition of students from many backgrounds, representing University of Maryland College Park, University of Maryland Baltimore Campus, University of Maryland Eastern Shore, University of Maryland Baltimore, Morgan State University, Salisbury University, Frostburg State University, Towson University, University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science, and St. Mary's College of Maryland, we request a favorable vote on HB1029.

Sincerely,

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³ http://files.cmeglobal.com/Monograph_2012_AUCCCD_Public.pdf

⁴ <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2013/06/college-students>