



**Testimony for the House Ways and Means Committee
February 24, 2022**

**House Bill 657 — Standardized Behavioral Health Questionnaire
for Development and Implementation Bill**

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The ACLU of Maryland's *Right to Education* works to ensure that all public school students can learn, thrive, and effectively engage in the social, political, and economic life of their community. Given the prevalence of behavioral health issues among students in Maryland's public schools, we strongly support HB 657 -Standardized Behavioral Health Questionnaire for Development and Implementation. HB 657 builds upon the work of Blueprint's Consortium on Coordinated Community Supports ("Consortium") by establishing a standardized way for parents to report any behavioral or mental health concern that they have about their child during the school enrollment process.

HB 657 tasks the Consortium, which is comprised of mostly mental health experts, to create guidelines for each school district's behavioral health coordinators to follow when developing their students behavioral health questionnaire. The bill will ensure that student information will be kept confidential. This bill is simply a tool for parents to report any concerns related to the behavioral health of their child — including but not limited to issues related to mental health, medical issues, stress in the child's social environment, and homelessness. School staff can then access the Consortium's network of community-based resources and providers to ensure that parents' and children's needs are met. The Consortium is funded at \$25 million now but that amount will grow to \$125 million by fiscal 2026, which will greatly expand the availability and access to services for children and families in Maryland. Addressing these barriers to learning and improving the overall school climate are core tenets of the Blueprint bill.

During the fall semester, several parents called the ACLU-MD asking about mental health services for their children. I helped one of these parents enroll her three children at a new school in Baltimore City. During the enrollment process, the parent asked about mental health resources as one of her children was experiencing significant mental health issues that were not present before the pandemic. After a week went by, I reached out to City Schools' central office and was told that her particular school had a partnership with an external mental health provider. I provided the contact information to the parent and the next

day, she reported that she had an appointment for her child that week with this provider. Since then, she has been happy with the services and her child is showing significant improvement in school.

We want to make sure that these community resources are known to parents and creating a form and a process to allow parents to report behavioral health issues during the enrollment process is a common-sense step to improve access and coordination of these services. Given that the Blueprint plan is moving forward, let's make sure that the planned investments in the Blueprint's Consortium on Coordinated Community Supports is proceeding in a way that maximizes impact for families and children statewide. We ask the committee to give HB657 a favorable report.

