



Maryland Youth Advisory Council  
c/o Governor's Office of Crime  
Prevention, Youth, and Victim Services  
100 Community Place,  
Crownsville, MD 21032

James Mu, *Chair*  
Ricky Bridges, *Vice-Chair*  
Jason Park, *Secretary*

---

March 22, 2022

The Honorable Paul G. Pinsky, Chair  
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs  
2 West Miller Senate Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**Re: HB 118**  
**Position: Support**

Dear Chairman Pinsky:

The Maryland Youth Advisory Council prides itself on being a group of young adults who work to serve as a voice for youth in the state of Maryland. As leaders in our communities and in our State, and as appointees of the Governor, President of the Senate, Speaker of the House, Maryland Association of Student Councils, Maryland Higher Education Commission, and the University System of Maryland, we take every opportunity to advise legislators and the Governor regarding issues facing youth.

**HB 118** allows students to receive excused absences for mental health. The Council strongly supports the bill as it aligns with the Council's focus on mental health and well-being in our Legislative Platform and as a legislative priority for the last two years.

The pandemic has highlighted the need for more mental health support among youth. A recent study in *Jama Pediatrics*<sup>1</sup> found that symptoms of depression and anxiety among adolescents have doubled since the onset of the pandemic. Providing the ability for students to focus on themselves, students will be more productive and better able to engage in their learning if they can take the much-needed time, in the form of a mental health day, to address their immediate health and well-being. The General Assembly must consider a holistic approach to supporting students inside and outside of the classroom, and allow students to take time for themselves to address their mental health needs.

There has been a focus on protecting physical health during COVID-19, however, the mental health of youth cannot be forgotten. Mental health poses a greater challenge than physical health. Unlike a physical illness, mental health involves a long process of healing and support. It can take years to recover from the mental distress caused by the pandemic, and schools need to implement policies to support the mental health needs of students. This bill is one step forward in creating that supportive school environment. The Council respectfully requests a favorable vote on **HB 118**.

Sincerely,

James Mu, Chair  
Maryland Youth Advisory Council

---

<sup>1</sup> Racine N, McArthur BA, Cooke JE, Eirich R, Zhu J, Madigan S. Global Prevalence of Depressive and Anxiety Symptoms in Children and Adolescents During COVID-19: A Meta-analysis. *JAMA Pediatrics*. 2021;175(11): 1142–1150. doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2021.2482 (<https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/fullarticle/2782796>)