

SB 852 Testimony

Thank you for allowing me to speak in support of Senate Bill 852. My name is Lea Jaspers and I am a lifelong health educator. Until just recently I served as the Health Education Specialist for the Maryland State Department of Education. I've seen *every* bill related to health education that has been proposed by the Maryland General Assembly for the last five years. The intention of *almost* every health education Bill was to advance the health literacy of students in Maryland schools. This intention is noble and even those Bills that did not become statutes have advanced State dialogue around health education programs.

Senate Bill 852 provides leadership for health education programs state-wide. It supports the teachers in our classroom who are asked to teach about consent, substance use, mental and emotional health, sexual violence, and suicide. It provides them with leaders who have expertise in pedagogy, curriculum, and who can provide them with the resources they need to advance the health literacy of students.

In 13 of the 24 Maryland school systems, teachers cannot access a central office leader who is certified in health education. The teachers implementing health education in these districts report to someone who is not a health educator, who has no formal training in health education, and most often this person cannot provide these teachers with a high-quality curriculum to guide their teaching.

The Maryland State Department of Education no longer has a certified health educator on staff. [COMAR](#) requires health education instruction to be taught yearly beginning in PreK. If we expect to see the type of health education that promotes health literacy - health education that is trauma-informed, skills-based, and rooted in behavior change theory, we must ensure there are district leaders who have the expertise to support the teachers who are implementing health education. We must ensure that what's required by the [Maryland Health Education Framework](#) is taught, Pre-K-12. To do this, we must ensure there are health education leaderships at the state and local school levels.

Thank you,

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