



Larry Hogan, Governor · Boyd K. Rutherford, Lt. Governor · Dennis R. Schrader, Secretary

February 24, 2022

The Honorable Vanessa E. Atterbeary  
Chair, Ways and Means Committee  
Room 131 House Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**RE: HB 657 – Public Schools - Standardized Behavioral Health Screenings for Students - Development and Implementation**

Dear Chair Atterbeary and Committee Members:

The Maryland Department of Health (MDH) is submitting this letter of information for House Bill (HB) 657 – Public Schools - Standardized Behavioral Health Screenings for Students - Development and Implementation.

HB 657 requires the Maryland Consortium on Coordinated Community Supports, in consultation with identified stakeholders, to develop guidelines for developing a standardized screening to identify students with behavioral health services needs. The standardized screening will be given to the parent or guardian of each student when the student enrolls for school and every year thereafter while the student is enrolled in the local school system.

Research shows that failure to address students' behavioral health needs is linked to poor academic performance, behavior problems, school violence, dropping out, substance abuse, special education referral, suicide, and criminal activity.<sup>1</sup> Based on preliminary data from the Maryland Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, in fiscal year (FY) 2021 there were 104 suicides reported among youth ages 0-25. This is an increase of 12% from the 93 suicides reported for youth ages 0-25 in FY 2018. Of the 104 youth in FY 2021, 16 (15.4%) accessed the Public Behavioral Health Service (PBHS) system of care. Early screening will enable the identification of at-risk youth and facilitate a connection to appropriate prevention and treatment services.

If you would like to discuss this further, please contact Heather Shek, Director, Office of Governmental Affairs at (443) 695-4218 or [heather.shek@maryland.gov](mailto:heather.shek@maryland.gov).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dennis R. Schrader".

Dennis R. Schrader  
Secretary

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<sup>1</sup> Darney, Reinke, Herman, Stormont, & Ialongo, 2013; Hawton, Saunders, & O'Connor, 2012