

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

FAVORABLE

Chair Atterbeary and Members of the Ways & Means Committee

The National Alliance on Mental Illness, Maryland and our 11 local affiliates across the state represent a statewide network of more than 45,000 families, individuals, community-based organizations, and service providers. NAMI Maryland provides education, support and advocacy for persons with mental illnesses, their families and the wider community.

HB 657 would require the Maryland Consortium on Coordinated Community Supports to develop, in consultation with stakeholders, guidelines for developing a standardized behavioral health screening to identify students with behavioral health service needs. Mental health screenings are a key part of youth mental health. Approximately 50% of lifetime mental health conditions begin by age 14 and 75% begin by age 24. At the same time, the average delay between when symptoms first appear and intervention is approximately 11 years. Mental health screenings allow for early identification and intervention and help bridge the gap.

We've found that early identification and treatment leads to better outcomes. Early treatment may also lessen long-term disability and prevent years of suffering. Health care screenings are common in this country, and mental health screenings should be no exception. NAMI strongly supports early mental health screening and bolstering existing screening programs. Early mental health screening should take place in a primary care doctor's office or in school.

Mental health screenings in schools allow staff to identify mental health conditions early and connect students with help. Ideally, schools should also be trained to work with the community mental health system and to discuss mental health concerns with families.

NAMI Maryland respectfully asks for a Favorable Report on HB 657

Kathryn S. Farinholt
Executive Director
National Alliance on Mental Illness, Maryland

Contact: Moira Cyphers
Compass Government Relations
MCyphers@compassadvocacy.com