



HB657 PUBLIC SCHOOLS - STANDARDIZED BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SCREENINGS FOR STUDENTS - DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

February 24, 2022

WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

OPPOSE

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Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS) opposes **HB657 Public Schools - Standardized Behavioral Health Screenings for Students - Development and Implementation**. This bill requires the Maryland Consortium on Coordinated Community Supports to develop, in consultation with certain stakeholders, guidelines for developing a standardized behavioral health screening to identify students with behavioral health service needs. It also requires that the screening be given to the parent or guardian of each student when the student enrolls for school and every year thereafter; and requiring each behavioral health services coordinator to develop and implement a certain standardized behavioral health screening.

AACPS recognizes the importance of promoting the positive mental health of all students through the development of impactful relationships and by teaching resilience. Student mental health is of particular importance during this time, when AACPS students are faced with a global health pandemic and other challenges. School counselors, school psychologists, school social workers, pupil personnel workers, and school nurses collaborate with staff, parents/guardians, and the community to overcome barriers to learning. The emphasis on multi-tiered systems of support, which also include Section 504 accommodations and restorative practices, further supports this effort and AACPS Strategic Plan emphasizing relationships, rigor, and readiness for all students. By removing barriers, providing resources, and teaching appropriate social-emotional skills, students gain the tools to be productive citizens.

AACPS has training, protocols, and practices in place to assist staff in recognizing warning signs related to behavioral health concerns and these students are referred to the student services team in the school buildings. This current protocol allows students to receive appropriate behavioral health support in a way that does not tax the system to the point in which the student services staff is unable to perform their job. While the Blueprint requires school systems to administer a standardized behavioral health screening to identify students with behavioral health service needs, it does not require school systems to do so on annual basis. A screening can be time consuming. This legislation is proposing a protocol that would be extremely burdensome to implement and would require significant additional staffing to implement.

While well-intentioned, this bill would place an extraordinary burden on the already understaffed student services staff – school counselors, school psychologists, and school social workers. Screening nearly 84,000 students and being required to respond in an extremely condensed timeframe to any student that indicated a concern pursuant to the behavioral health screening on an annual basis would utterly overwhelm the system. School systems simply do not have the staff to implement this bill. AACPS opposes any legislation which increase staff workloads.

We also have significant concerns about the potential liability to schools and districts, for asking students to disclose any behavioral health conditions but not ensuring immediate follow-up and referrals for support if needed.

Finally, this legislation would have a significant fiscal impact on the school system. AACPS would likely be required to double the number of student services staff available in each school to perform the behavioral health screenings and perform the follow-up interventions as a result of the screenings. AACPS opposes unfunded mandates.

Accordingly, AACPS respectfully requests an **UNFAVORABLE** committee report on HB657.