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January 18, 2022

To: **Members of the Ways and Means Committee**
Re: HB 118 – Public Schools – Student Attendance – Excused Absences for
Mental Health Needs
Position: **FAVORABLE**

Chair Atterbeary and Honorable Members of the House Ways and Means Committee,

The Baltimore City Council Suicide Prevention Legislative Workgroup is composed of providers, survivors, advocates, faith leaders, elected officials, nonprofit organizations, educators, community leaders, and researchers dedicated to decreasing barriers Baltimore City residents face to access efficient and effective mental health services to support their mental health, and prevent suicides from occurring within our city.

To this end, the Suicide Prevention Legislative Workgroup urges a favorable report on HB 118 – Public Schools – Student Attendance – Excused Absences for Mental Health Needs.

According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), 57,000 Maryland youth (aged 6-17) have depression. 45.5% of youth aged 12-17 who have depression did not receive mental health care in the last year¹. Disturbingly, data from 2018 indicates a trend toward suicidal thoughts and behaviors among middle and high school students in Maryland's public schools. This is especially true for youth that identify as LGBTQ+. Lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth are 4 times more likely to attempt suicide than straight youth. Further, a 2015 survey of transgender adults found that 40% of respondents had attempted suicide in their lifetime². We know that time away from peers, the illness and death of loved ones, and other traumas caused by COVID-19 will have a lasting negative impact on Maryland's young people.

This bill provides that absences from school for mental health needs are lawful absences. Schools must recognize that mental health is just as important a facet of overall wellness as any other physical health need. Maryland's youth deserve time and space to recover from mental health crises; giving them time to recover will ultimately lead to better academic outcomes, stronger social bonds, and a higher overall quality of life³.

Further, this bill mandates that students that that are absent due to a mental health need will meet with a school mental health specialist that can complete an assessment and offer treatment options as needed. This stipulation ensures that mental health needs are addressed as soon as

¹ <https://www.nami.org/NAMI/media/NAMI-Media/StateFactSheets/MarylandStateFactSheet.pdf>

² [2020 Maryland State Suicide Prevention Plan.pdf](#)

³ <https://www.sprc.org/colleges-universities/consequences>

possible and creates an additional safety net to give students the care they deserve. This is an important step in fostering an environment that empowers students to dialogue about mental health, increases awareness of available resources, and promotes general health and wellness in school.

The Baltimore City Suicide Prevention Legislative Workgroup thus urges a favorable report on HB 118 – Public Schools – Student Attendance – Excused Absences for Mental Health Needs.

Sincerely,



Nick J. Mosby
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