

In Support Testimony
House Bill No. 0375
Appropriations and Ways and Means Committees
Delegate Ben Barnes, Appropriations Chair
Delegate Vanessa E. Atterbeary, Ways and Means Chair

March 9, 2023 – 1:00 pm

Delgate Barnes, Delegate Atterbeary, members of the Appropriations and Ways and Means Committees, I am Dr. Erin Haugen, a Licensed Psychologist in the states of North Dakota and Minnesota specializing in sport psychology. I am also a Mental Health First Aid ® Instructor. Alston for Athletes asked that I appear today in support of House Bill 0375, which would require all coaches in Maryland at public institutions to go through Mental Health First Aid ® training. As a licensed psychologist since 2007 and Mental Health First Aid ® instructor since 2021, I can speak to the positive impact that this training will have on the sport ecosystem, which includes athlete mental health.

As a licensed psychologist specializing in sport psychology, I am keenly aware of the mental health and substance use concerns our athletes face. Research by Kessler and colleagues in 2005 indicates approximately 75% of all mental health concerns begin prior to age 24, which coincides with peak years of athletic development. Since the onset of the pandemic, these mental health concerns have increased. Data shared by the NCAA in May 2022 indicated that the rates of reported mental health concerns experienced in the previous month were 1.5 to 2 times higher than reported by NCAA student-athletes prior to 2020 (the onset of the pandemic). Similar concerns have been reported by high school athletes.

Coaches have unique relationships with athletes that place them in ideal positions to recognize and respond effectively to athlete mental health

concerns. A study by Kroshus and colleagues in 2019 (prior to the pandemic) indicated approximately 65% of coaches were concerned about mental health issues experienced by athletes they coached. However, many coaches report that they feel ill-equipped to support athlete mental health and desire more role-appropriate training in this area.

As a Mental Health First Aid ® instructor, I am fortunate to provide this training to many within the sport ecosystem, which includes coaches and collegiate student-athletes. This training is helpful for teaching coaches how to recognize, respond, and refer athletes experiencing mental health concerns to appropriate professionals. It also teaches skills that coaches can use to work effectively with student-athletes. Coaches frequently give me feedback that the skills learned in this program are invaluable to them in and out of sport. Whenever I teach classes to collegiate student-athletes, the feedback is always that Mental Health First Aid ® training should be required for coaches.

I am passionate about athlete mental health and believe all in the sport ecosystem should be empowered with role-appropriate mental health training. Mental Health First Aid ® is an evidence-based program designed to teach non-mental health professionals how to identify, respond, and refer individuals experiencing potential mental health and substance use concerns to appropriate professionals. Therefore, this training offers the opportunity for coaches to enhance their existing communication skills while also learning how to have conversations that effectively link athletes to professional help.

In conclusion, as a licensed psychologist specializing in sport psychology and Mental Health First Aid ® instructor, I am in support of HB 0375. Therefore, I urge the committees to also support HB 0375. I appreciate your time and the opportunity to share testimony with you.