

## GOVERNOR'S COMMISSION ON SUICIDE PREVENTION

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**Henry J. Meiser – Student Commissioner**

Term: October 2021 to July 2023

**TO:** House Appropriations Committee

**RE:** House Bill 573 – Maryland Higher Education Commission – Access to Mental Health Advisory Commission – Establishment

**POSITION:** Favorable

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Chair Barnes, Vice-Chair Chang, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Henry J. Meiser, and I have had the pleasure of serving as the Student Commissioner to the Governor's Commission on Suicide Prevention since 2021, and my subsequent reappointment in 2023 by the Moore-Miller Administration. In this role, I represent all 900,00+ primary and secondary school students within the State of Maryland. I also regularly present and speak as a subject-matter expert on school safety, school security, and the mental health and wellbeing of students in the United States. While not here to testify on behalf of the commission as a whole, I am here to testify in my capacity as the Student Commissioner in unequivocal favor of House Bill 573.

HB573 plays a key role in the implementation of quality mental health resources in Maryland higher education institutions. It also establishes a proper venue for feedback to be received about these resources. The Governor's Commission on Suicide Prevention is dedicated to promoting comprehensive and coordinated programs and services designed to reduce the incidence of suicide and suicide attempts, and to promote resilience, hope, and healing. The Commission is charged with developing a state Suicide Prevention Plan every two years. In the 2022-2024 Plan that we submitted to the Governor this past fall, we called for behavioral health equity<sup>1</sup>, better and more-timely use of suicide related data<sup>2</sup>, and the strengthening of crisis care and care transitions<sup>3</sup>. HB 573 supports all of these goals within the confines of our systems of higher education.

This Commission is also innovative and forward-thinking in the sense that, with the recent amendment, this Commission allocates 5 spots for students to participate in the Commission. Students, without question, have the biggest stake in the educational process – it is their everyday lived experience.

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<sup>1</sup> Governor's Commission on Suicide Prevention, 2022-2024 State Plan, Page 11

<sup>2</sup> Governor's Commission on Suicide Prevention, 2022-2024 State Plan, Page 6 (Goal #7)

<sup>3</sup> Governor's Commission on Suicide Prevention, 2022-2024 State Plan, Page 6 (Goal #5)

**HB 593** – Maryland Higher Education Commission  
Access to Mental Health Advisory Commission – Establishment

Equitable access to mental health resources directly correlates with lower rates of death by suicide, particularly in students and young adults<sup>4</sup>. This Commission will allow stakeholders and subject-matter experts to confer and discuss how mental health resources and services on campus can be improved, created, changed, or implemented; needless to say, a very important discussion which must be had.

For these reasons, I would ask that this committee issue a favorable report on HB 573.

Most Respectfully,



Henry J. Meiser  
*Student Commissioner*  
**Governor's Commission on  
Suicide Prevention**

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<sup>4</sup> Ku BS, Li J, Cathy Lally, Compton MT, Druss BG. Associations between mental health shortage areas and county-level suicide rates among adults aged 25 and older in the USA, 2010 to 2018. *Gen Hosp Psychiatry.* 2021 May-Jun;70:44-50. doi: 10.1016/j.genhosppsych.2021.02.001. Epub 2021 Feb 8. PMID: 33714795; PMCID: PMC8127358.