

House Bill 375 Education - Coaches - Mental Health First Aid Training
House Appropriations Committee
March 9, 2023
Position: SUPPORT

Mental Health Association of Maryland (MHAMD) is a nonprofit education and advocacy organization that brings together consumers, families, clinicians, advocates and concerned citizens for unified action in all aspects of mental health and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as behavioral health). We appreciate the opportunity to provide this testimony in support of House Bill 375.

HB 375 requires Maryland public schools and public institutions of higher education to provide mental health first aid training to all coaches participating in athletic programs. Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) is a world-renowned, evidence-based program that teaches how to recognize and respond to a person with a mental health or substance use concern or crisis.

MHAMD worked with the Maryland Behavioral Health Administration, the National Council for Mental Wellbeing, and the Missouri Department of Health to adapt MHFA for the United States. Since 2009, MHAMD has been responsible for the development, oversight and implementation of the statewide *MHFA Maryland* program. The program has trained over 73,000 Marylanders, including over 2500 instructors. MHAMD utilizes a corps of instructors and master trainers who primarily deliver free and scholarship-based trainings through a state grant. This ensures that no one seeking MHFA training is turned away.

Pressure to perform can have a profound impact on an athlete's mental wellbeing. In a study of elite Canadian swimmers, it was found that 68% of the surveyed athletes met criteria for a major depressive episode. The depression prevalence doubled among the top 25% of athletes. Female athletes in particular are at risk for depression, according to a study by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I, the NCAA's most competitive division.¹ One study found "many student-athletes report higher levels of negative emotional states than non-student athlete adolescents."²

Injuries are also a frequent catalyst for anxiety, depression, and substance use among athletes. Many athletes may also show signs of posttraumatic stress disorder following a traumatic injury.³ In a study of NCAA Division I football players, 33% of injured athletes reported high levels of depressive symptoms compared with 27% of non-injured athletes.⁴

These prevalence data indicate a need to increase the availability of MHFA training for coaches. For this reason, MHAMD supports HB 375 and urges a favorable report.

¹ Yang J, Peek-Asa C, Corlette JD, et al. [Prevalence of and risk factors associated with symptoms of depression in competitive collegiate student athletes](#). *Clin J Sport Med*. 2007;17(6):481-487.

² Neal TL, Diamond AB, Goldman S, et al. [Interassociation recommendations for developing a plan to recognize and refer student-athletes with psychological concerns at the secondary school level: a consensus statement](#). *J Athl Train*. 2015;50(3):231-249.

³ Specialized care supports athletes' unique mental health needs. The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center. News release. February 7, 2022. Accessed March 14, 2022. <http://osuwmc.multimedia-newsroom.com/index.php/2022/02/07/specialized-care-supports-athletes-unique-mental-health-needs/>

⁴ Brewer BW, Petrie TA. A comparison between injured and uninjured football players on selected psychological variables. *Acad Athl J*. 1995;10:11-18.

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