

Senate Bill 263 Maryland Higher Education Commission – Access to Mental Health Advisory Committee - Establishment

Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

February 8, 2023

Position: SUPPORT

The Mental Health Association of Maryland 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, mental illness and substance use. We appreciate this opportunity to present testimony in support of Senate Bill 263.

SB 263 establishes a committee to study and make recommendations regarding access to mental health services on higher education campuses, review best practices for accessing services and identify the best models for providing services.

A 2020 study on the mental health of 4,000 college students in the United States produced harrowing results. Of these students, 39% reported major or moderate depression, 34% reported an anxiety disorder, 23% experienced non-suicidal self-injury in the past year, and 13% had experienced suicidal ideation in the past year. Despite these high numbers, only 53% of the students who had positive depression or anxiety screens received mental health therapy or psychiatric medications.¹

The COVID-19 pandemic has heavily impacted the mental health of college students in Maryland and across the United States. In the fall 2020 Active Minds survey of high school and college students, nearly 75% reported worsened mental health since the beginning of the pandemic, with increases in stress, anxiety, sadness, and depression. The influence of the higher education setting can help address these increased challenges. Of the surveyed students, 66% received information regarding mental health from their institution, and 71% reported they knew where to seek professional mental health services if they needed immediate help.²

Colleges are faced with an increased need without increased resources. Directors of college counseling services have reported rising students needing services, with demand growing at least five times faster than the average student enrollment.³ SB 263 is an opportunity for Maryland to ensure college students have access to the best possible services in a time where suicide is the 3rd leading cause of death for those aged 10-34.⁴ For these reasons, MHAMD supports SB 263 and urges a favorable report.

¹<https://healthymindsnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/HMS-Fall-2020-National-Data-Report.pdf>

²<https://www.activeminds.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Student-Mental-Health-Data-Sheet-Fall-2020-1.pdf>

³<https://www.mghclaycenter.org/parenting-concerns/college-mental-health-crisis-call-cultural-change-part-2/>

⁴<https://afsp.org/facts/maryland>