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Ways and Means Committee

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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony of Delegate Dana Jones
Before the Environment, Energy, and the Education Committee

In Support of HB 878
Public Schools - Student Telehealth Appointments - Policy and Access
March 29th, 2023, 1pm

Chair Feldman, Vice-Chair Kagan, and fellow members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee,

For the record - I am Delegate Dana Jones.

I come before you today to introduce a bill that would simply require county boards of education to establish a policy to accommodate public middle and high school students who need to access telehealth services during the school day, and require a space be provided inside the schools for these appointments.

Nationwide we have been experiencing an increase in mental health issues. Although this has been felt population wide, our youth have been particularly hard hit. According to the Center for Disease Control, in the 10 years leading up to the pandemic, feelings of persistent sadness and hopelessness—as well as suicidal thoughts and behaviors—increased by about 40% among young people. And as emphasized by the American Psychological Association, the pandemic has exacerbated these issues for many children.

These impacts are particularly devastating to our LGBTQ+ youth. A 2021 national survey on LGBTQ+ youth by the Trevor Project revealed 42% of respondents seriously considered attempting suicide in the prior year.

Telehealth services play an important role in expanding care to address the increasing need, and for many middle and high school students it is the most efficient and effective way to receive care. Access to mental health services can help increase school attendance and learning

outcomes. However, students seeking telehealth appointments often need to take those appointments during the school day, and at present, some school districts are preventing this from taking place.

Currently, if a student needs to take a telehealth appointment during school, they must have a parent drive to school and sign them out. This dynamic presents a multitude of issues, but most importantly, equity. A significant portion of students do not have parents who can afford to take off work to sign them out of school. This creates a barrier for students, and ultimately prevents children from accessing care completely. Especially our marginalized population.

Additionally, when a child is signed out of school for mental health care, it is often advised that the appointments take place in the car with their parents. This creates a privacy issue for all students. Without equitable access to mental health services, our youth are disproportionately negatively impacted.

The Blueprint made clear that mental health, and access to care, would be a cornerstone of its implementation. Mental Health services support our children emotionally, educationally, and socially. We must remove as many barriers as possible to students who are attempting to receive care, and HB 878 works to remove those barriers.

This bill includes three small changes that were made by the Ways and Means Committee:

- 1: Technical
- 2: Requires each middle and high school to implement measures to ensure the safety and privacy of a student participating in a telehealth appointment.
- 3: Strikes the training provision, in favor of a requirement for the schools to simply make personnel aware of the policy objectives and requirements.

I respectfully urge a favorable report on HB 878.



Delegate Dana Jones