

**Committee:** Education, Energy and the Environment

**Testimony on:** SB263 – Access to Mental Health Advisory Committee – Establishment

**Position:** Favorable

6 February 2023

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and the members of the Environment and Transportation Committee,

*The University of Maryland, Student Government Association* supports SB263 in establishing the Access to Mental Health Advisory Committee in Higher Education. This bill is important because it prioritizes mental health in college aged students.

My name is Caroline Thorne and I'm the Director of Government Affairs at the University of Maryland Student Government Association. I am in support of SB263 because over the last decade, counseling centers across the nation, and therefore Maryland, have experienced an increase in the demand for mental health services. These numbers have only increased with the pandemic. Looking at the University of Maryland, College Park, between 2016-2019, the Counseling Center saw a 26% increase in students seeking mental health services. As services stand, there is not enough support to meet student's needs. Speaking as a student who struggles with mental health, booking a counseling appointment can be timely and difficult. Last year, I was told due to high demand, appointments are released in batches every two weeks. I was instructed to wake up at 8 am, and call the counseling center line again and again, until they pick up. Ultimately, I did not get an appointment. Though I was able to locate outside resources, not every student can do this. The system as it stands is a barrier to students seeking help.

Mental health is just as important as physical health. At university, students are far away from their parents, their homes and their usual support systems. This bill is a necessity, in my opinion, because it acknowledges that there is no one size fits all solution for each institution, and provides personalized recommendations. Supporting mental health resources is a return on investment for the State of Maryland, as it ensures that students can attend university in the best state that they can. I respectfully request a favorable vote on SB263.

Thank you,



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