



PSSAM
Public School Superintendents' Association
OF MARYLAND

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BILL: HB 878
TITLE: Public Schools - Student Telehealth Appointments - Policy and Access
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POSITION: Letter of Concern
COMMITTEE: Education, Energy, and the Environment
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The Public School Superintendents' Association of Maryland (PSSAM), on behalf of all twenty-four public school superintendents, **provides this letter of concern** regarding House Bill 878.

House Bill 878 requires each local board of education to establish a policy to accommodate students who need to participate in telehealth appointments scheduled during the school day. Each local board must ensure that the local school system publishes the student telehealth policy in the student handbook and makes school personnel aware of student telehealth policy objectives and requirements. On request, the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) must provide technical assistance to local boards to establish telehealth policies. The bill takes effect July 1, 2023.

During the pandemic, many people found that telehealth was a lifeline to speak with their doctors during a very traumatic and fragile time. Just as the COVID-19 pandemic created many challenges in the delivery of public education, it highlighted the value and potential of virtual health services, as well as virtual learning. There is no doubt that both of these technologies will continue in public schools and for the general public, well past the end of this pandemic. As the state's top educators, superintendents are very interested in this new model of health care for our students, but we have many operational concerns with this legislation.

In order to ensure the highest quality public education in Maryland, we need to approach telehealth in schools with a deliberate, methodical, and research-based approach. We need to create opportunities for students to safely speak to medical professionals, but also have support

systems in place at each school if telehealth appointments create a challenge for students in returning to the classroom. Some of our operational concerns include finding an appropriate and private space, the coordination of use of the room, and appointment-making. Privacy concerns are very real, as well concerns over whether or not parental consent is needed and ensuring the communication with the parents. The need for behavioral health services have skyrocketed during and following the pandemic. In the realm of mental health services, consistent appointments are a best practice; however, if these appointments are by telehealth during the school day, the student's academic success could be challenged if they are consistently missing instruction. On the flip side, we see the equitable benefit of telehealth in helping families who are challenged in getting to appointments due to transportation or work commitments.

So while PSSAM sees positive aspects of this legislation, we highly recommend that the committee consider creating a workgroup with all of the affected stakeholders, including MDH, MSDE, school nurses, other health or support providers in the schools, and families and parents.

For these reasons, PSSAM provides this **letter of concern with regard to** House Bill 878 and requests either an unfavorable report or amendments to provide for a workgroup to study these very important issues.