

House Bill 82, Maryland Medical Assistance and Children's Health Insurance Programs -
School-Based Behavioral Health Services - Reimbursement

Before the House of Delegates' Health & Government Operations Committee

Favorable

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I am a member of the Montgomery County Council, representing District 5. I am submitting this testimony on my own behalf, respectfully urging a favorable report on HB82. One of the most common issues I have heard raised by constituents over the last couple years, from my time on the campaign trail through my time in office, is the mental health crisis impacting our youth. The community sees the many ways the trauma and disruption of the last few years is playing out amongst our young people, impacting their academic performance and social-emotional well-being, and having ripple effects in the public safety sphere.

We must take action to increase access to mental health services for our youth, and HB82 will do that.

One in six youth have a mental health condition like anxiety or depression, but only half of those youth receive any mental health services. Since children spend much of their time in educational settings, schools offer a unique opportunity for early identification, prevention, and interventions that serve students where they already are, especially for underserved communities. Montgomery County has had great success reaching children through our existing School-Based Wellness Centers, currently at five of our public high schools. Increasing the availability and funding for school-based behavioral health services would be tremendously impactful.

In 2014, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services expanded the use of Medicaid to pay for school health services for all Medicaid-enrolled students. As of December 2021, eighteen states have taken the necessary steps to align their state Medicaid plan with federal policy to access these funds. Maryland has not yet done so.

HB82/SB201 will ensure Maryland joins other states to fully access Medicaid funding for much-needed mental health services for Maryland students.

I urge a favorable report by the Committee on HB82 and deliver a timely, tangible response to the intense mental health needs of our young people. Thank you for your support and partnership on this important issue.