



**Board of Education of Howard County
Testimony Submitted to the Maryland Senate,
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
March 29, 2023**

**Board of Education
of Howard County**

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**HB0878: UNFAVORABLE
Public Schools - Student Telehealth Appointments - Policy and Access**

The Board of Education of Howard County (the Board) opposes **HB0878 Public Schools - Student Telehealth Appointments - Policy and Access** due to logistical concerns for its implementation.

HB0878 requires local school systems to develop a policy and accommodate telehealth appointments for students at the middle and high school level. "Telehealth" is defined under the bill as a mode of delivering health care services through the use of telecommunications technologies by a health care practitioner to a patient at a different physical location than the health care practitioner. In order to accommodate these appointments, schools must designate a space that is private, has internet access, includes at least one seating option with a flat surface and electrical outlet nearby to accommodate placement of a laptop, and is not a bathroom or closet. School systems must publish the student telehealth policy in the student handbook and provide training to school personnel on student telehealth policy objectives and requirements.

Currently in Howard County, to assist vulnerable student populations with access to important health services, the Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) operates 11 school-based wellness centers in conjunction with the Howard County Health Department, which can include telehealth appointments in the health room with the school nurse facilitating the visit. HB0878 sets up scenarios, however, where appointments made by parents for any number of somatic or mental health concerns with personal providers would happen during the school day. Parents are currently asked to sign students out of school when taking such appointments similar to visiting providers in person.

Should HB0878 pass, operational and administrative burdens on local schools, as well as unintended consequences, may include:

- Although the bill indicates nothing requires a school to construct an addition or new space to comply with the policy, schools would still need to make a specific room that meets the parameters of the required policy available at all times. With limited physical space currently available, this will take a room in each middle and high school away from other school priorities.

- Although the bill only calls for a policy to be developed, school personnel would ultimately be responsible for coordinating student appointment times and use of the designated space. This would be further complicated given parents are responsible for making appointments with private providers, which may overlap with appointments made by other parents.
- Similarly, although the bill only calls for a policy to be developed, school personnel will be responsible for supervising use and safety of the designated space. While staff would not be directly involved in the appointment itself due to privacy concerns when the student is interacting with a private/non-school health provider, in order to ensure safety and proper use of the designated space a responsible staff member would need to be attentive during use. In a worst case scenario, a student who has an appointment may become overwhelmed, confused, or otherwise need parent or guardian support when no one is in the room with them at the time.
- Although the bill only indicates the designated space must have access to internet, electric, and a flat surface to accommodate placement of a laptop – with no requirement for schools to provide a device – how would schools accommodate appointments for a student who did not have their own device outside of a school-issued Chromebook? Would the school be required to allow a student to install non-approved technology and platforms that connect to their specific doctor/provider in order to accommodate the visit? Would staff be required to provide technical assistance to a student having trouble connecting even when on a personal device?

While well intentioned, staff indicates logistics for this topic need further consideration before legislating a policy mandate as called for under HB0878.

For these reasons, we urge an UNFAVORABLE report of HB0878 from this Committee.