

February 8, 2023

Chairwoman Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and other members of the Ways and Means committee,

The National Alliance on Mental Illness, Maryland and our 11 local affiliates across the state represent a statewide network of more than 58,000 families, individuals, community-based organizations, and service providers. NAMI Maryland is a non-profit that is dedicated to providing education, support, and advocacy for persons with mental illnesses, their families and the wider community.

[One in six](#)¹ U.S. youth aged 6-17 experience a mental health disorder each year, and [half](#)² of all mental health conditions begin by age 14. Yet, [only roughly half](#)³ of youth with mental health conditions received any kind of treatment in the past year. Undiagnosed, untreated, or inadequately treated mental illnesses can significantly interfere with a student's ability to learn, grow, and develop. Since children spend much of their productive time in educational settings, schools offer a unique opportunity for early identification, prevention, and interventions that serve students where they already are.

Early identification and effective treatment for children and their families can make a difference in the lives of children with mental health conditions. In fact, the earlier the treatment, the better the outcomes and lower the costs. Unfortunately, far too often, there are long delays before the children and youth get the help they need.

Schools can play an important role in helping children and youth get help early. Through the development of this questionnaire, parents and schools will be able to identify the warning signs of an emerging mental health condition. When we invest in children's mental health to make sure they can get the right care at the right time, we improve the lives of children, youth, and families — and our communities. Supporting children's mental health is critical to their psychological well-being, social and emotional development, academic achievement, and long-term success.

NAMI MD fully supports the development of a standardized questionnaire to help identify students who may be in need of behavioral and mental health services. However, a behavioral health professional is not included in the listed stakeholders. It is imperative that this bill explicitly states the need for a behavioral health professional to have a seat at the table when developing this questionnaire.

We thank Delegate Guyton for her work in ensuring that mental health needs in our youth can be recognized before they progress further. Early intervention saves lives. We ask for a favorable report with the addition of a mental/behavioral health professional explicitly listed as a stakeholder.

¹ "US National and State-Level Prevalence of Mental Health Disorders and Disparities of Mental Health Care Use in Children" -- <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/fullarticle/2724377?guestAccessKey=f689aa19-31f1-481d-878a-6bf83844536a>

² "Lifetime prevalence and age-of-onset distributions of DSM-IV disorders in the National Comorbidity Survey Replication" -- <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/15939837/>

³ See Footnote '1'