



Delegate Vanessa E. Atterbeary, Chair
Delegate Jheanelle K. Wilkins, Vice Chair
Ways and Means Committee
Room 131 House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

February 1st, 2023

Bill: House Bill 265 –
Public Schools - Standardized Behavioral Health Screenings for Students - Development and Implementation

Position: Support w/ Amendment

Dear Chairwoman Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and Members of the Committee:

I am writing on behalf of the Maryland School Psychologists' Association (MSPA), a professional organization representing about 500 school psychologists in Maryland. We advocate for the social-emotional, behavioral, and academic wellbeing of students and families across the state.

Behavioral health screening tools are important components of comprehensive social, emotional, and behavioral support systems because such instruments help identify at-risk students. As school-based professionals trained in the development, administration, and interpretation of those tools, school psychologists are vital members of organizations tasked with creating guidelines for developing and implementing screening instruments. Moreover, because school psychologists serve at the level of individual school buildings, school psychologists also will play vital roles in analyzing screening tool data.

To function adequately, screening tools must collect reliable and valid data. Improper survey design and interpretation risks both under and over identification of students requiring services such as community based mental health supports. Further, unreliable instruments of questionable validity risk introducing biases into the screening process based on students' demographic characteristics. Such biases risk inequitable provision of badly needed social, emotional, and behavioral health services. Thus, committees tasked with creating guidelines for developing screening tools as well as teams tasked with developing, implementing, and interpreting the tools must be composed of professionals trained in those areas.

Because of the above considerations, we respectfully ask that the committee consider adding a school psychologist to the list of professionals mandated for inclusion in the consortium. In addition, we ask that the committee consider schools' abilities to distribute, collect, and interpret the screening tools given current staffing shortages. Although NASP recommends a ratio of one school psychologist for every 500 students, per the February 2022 America's School Mental Health Report Card, Maryland's current ratio is one school psychologist for every 1198 students. Because beneficent educational decisions require correct data interpretation, schools will need school psychologists to help teams draw valid screening data conclusions. Thus, we respectfully ask that the committee take measures necessary to address school psychologist shortages while planning implementation of the screening processes contained in the bill.

If we can provide any further information or be of any additional assistance, please contact us at legislative@mSPAonline.org or Sarah Peters at speters@hbstrategies.us.

Respectfully submitted,

Katie Phipps, M.ED., Ed.S., NCSP
Chair, Legislative Committee
Maryland School Psychologists' Association