

GOVERNOR'S COMMISSION ON SUICIDE PREVENTION

Henry J. Meiser – Student Commissioner

Term: October 2021 to July 2023

TO: House Ways and Means Committee

RE: House Bill 593 – Public Schools – Lifesaver Schools Program – Establishment

POSITION: Favorable

Chair Atterbeary, Vice-Chair Wilkins, and distinguished members of the Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Henry J. Meiser, and I have had the pleasure of serving as the Student Commissioner to the Governor's Commission on Suicide Prevention since 2021, and my subsequent reappointment in 2023 by the Moore-Miller Administration. In this role, I represent all 900,00+ primary and secondary school students within the State of Maryland. I also regularly present and speak as a subject-matter expert on school safety, school security, and the mental health and wellbeing of students in the United States. While not here to testify on behalf of the commission as a whole, I am here to testify in my capacity as the Student Commissioner in unequivocal favor of House Bill 593, establishing the Lifesaver Program within our schools.

This bill works to bridge the gap between quality resources which currently exist and Maryland schools in an innovative fashion, concurrent with a society constantly migrating towards a more virtual presence. It makes sense – it is important that we recognize and distinguish those schools which go the extra mile to provide tools and skillsets to school stakeholders; tools and skillsets which could, as the bill's name implies, save a life.

There is no question that the Lifesaver Schools Program is enabling our students to excel both in and outside of the classroom. By requiring designated schools to train and inform students and staff members on topics such as 1st aid, cardiopulmonary resuscitation, mental health and wellness, and other venues for professional developments, we are providing our students with the tools they need to succeed, and tools which they can use to uplift and help others to succeed as well.

Speaking specifically to its benefit to our students, HB593/establishing the Lifesaver Program certification also mandates that designated schools establish an *easily accessible webpage* that includes resources for mental health and wellness.

Today, many issues now have the ability to follow students home from school. Prior to our modern-day social media, networking, and mass communication, it was much easier for a student to disconnect from their struggles at schools, spend time with family, and realize that tomorrow is a new day to begin fresh. If nothing else, it gave them time away from whatever the issue may be. But now, if a student is being bullied, the bullying can continue through cyberbullying or texting at home; if a student fails an exam, they are constantly reminded of their status in that class by the glaring “F” staring at them on their online gradebook, at home.

The bottom line is, issues at school can follow a student home in a way that they never have been able to before. As our school systems, and our society for that matter, migrate to a more virtual world, it is crucial that our resources follow in step.

HB 593 carries a great amount of importance with me specifically because of recent changes to certain mental health resources. In July of 2022, Maryland migrated to the 988 suicide/crisis hotline, replacing the prior infrastructure which was supported by Maryland 211. As I conduct my outreach all over the State as the Student Representative, I have been absolutely shocked and disheartened by the number of Maryland students who have no idea what 988 is. It is so vitally important for our students (and everyone, for that matter) to be knowledgeable and familiar with the mental health, suicide prevention, 1st aid, and crisis resources available to them for their good, and the good of others. By requiring the regular dissemination of these resources, HB 593 will usher forward a generation of better-informed students and educators, for the well-being of our entire state.

On behalf of Maryland’s more than 900,000 students, I urge this committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 593 – Public Schools – Lifesaver Program, in order to ensure our students are well-informed, aware, and knowledgeable on key mental, behavioral, and physical health issues.

Most Respectfully,



Henry J. Meiser
Student Commissioner
**Gov.’s Commission on
Suicide Prevention**