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**House Bill 878 Public Schools - Student Telehealth Appointments - Policy and Access**

House Ways and Means Committee

March 1, 2023

**Position: Support**

The Mental Health Association of Maryland is a nonprofit education and advocacy organization that brings together consumers, families, clinicians, advocates and concerned citizens for unified action in all aspects of mental health, mental illness and substance use. We work to advance a system of care that is readily and equitably accessible to children and families, which promotes mental wellbeing and resiliency, and that is family driven and youth guided.

MHAMD is in strong support of House Bill 878, which would increase access to telehealth for children and adolescents by requiring each county board of education to establish a policy for accommodating appointments during the school day. It would require each public middle and high school to designate a private space for these appointments, which we see as a critical tool in supporting access to behavioral health care for Maryland's students.

Maryland youth continue to face a mental health crisis which has only been exasperated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Approximately 1 out of 5 Maryland teens have seriously considered attempting suicide, 36% of Maryland high school students have felt sad or hopeless every day for two weeks in a row, and Black students (52%) and LGBT students (75%) have felt significantly sadder and more hopeless compared to the statewide average. Meanwhile, over the past 10 years Maryland has seen a marked decline in availability of services and supports for youth with behavioral health needs. HB 878 is a critical component in rebuilding a robust array of service access for these youth.

HB 878 has the potential to reduce inequities in access, promoting the safety and autonomy of our youth and adolescents by reducing barriers to treatment. Lack of access to privacy during a call with a mental health practitioner jeopardizes the safety of marginalized youth and creates barriers of inequity for youth with caregivers who may more easily be able to take off of work to help their children make these appointments. The influx of funding from the Consortium for Coordinated Community Supports underscores the critical role of expanding access to behavioral health treatment within the school setting, and this bill aligns succinctly with this critical set of investments.

HB 878 removes what should otherwise be a simple barrier to care and supports the mental wellbeing and safety of our youth. MHAMD is in support of this bill and urges a favorable report.

*For more information contact:*

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