

February 13, 2024

Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Chang, and distinguished members of the Appropriations 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.

As a young adult, the transition to college can be intimidating. Many college students meet the criteria for at least one mental health problem. 75% of all mental health conditions begin by age 24. NAMI Maryland believes that colleges and universities should provide a full array of services, supports and appropriate accommodations for both campus-based and commuting students. The array should include mental health evaluations, peer support specialists, and on campus support. With a robust array of services, student's can be supported through their mental health conditions and remain in school.

However, many mental health symptoms are unpredictable. No one plans to have a crisis. In some instances, students may be unable to keep up with their academic responsibilities due to mental illness or staying in school/on campus may be unsafe or unhelpful for their well-being. Most colleges have a process for taking time off in a mental health emergency. However, many colleges do not refund tuition or fees.

NAMI MD supports HB539, which would require public institutions of higher education in the state to establish a policy that would allow students to withdraw under extenuating circumstances and be reimbursed the tuition and fees they paid for the semester in which the student withdraws. Mental illness can develop and/or worsen over time and can be severe and persistent enough to interfere with a student's ability to function. Given the high cost of a college education, it is only just that a student be reimbursed for the tuition paid when they must withdraw due to an extenuating circumstance out of their control.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable report.