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BILL: Senate Bill 492 Public Schools - Student Telehealth Appointments - Policy and Access

DATE:

POSITION: FAVORABLE

COMMITTEE: Education, Energy, and Environment

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Annapolis Pride's mission is to advocate for, empower, and celebrate our LGBTQ+ community in Anne Arundel County to live fully and authentically. Our vision is a safe, equitable, and anti-racist community where people of all identities thrive. As such, Annapolis Pride enthusiastically supports Senate Bill 492.

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed many things for youth, including access to Telehealth appointments for all forms of healthcare. By requiring schools to create a private space for students to access Telehealth appointments while at school, this bill can help improve school attendance as well as mental and physical health outcomes for youth.

To attend in-person health appointments, parents often have to take time off of work to pick up their student from school, attend the appointment, and then return the student to school or home before returning to work. Such an arrangement can be particularly burdensome for parents, particularly those who work hourly, who lose pay or may find difficulty taking the time off. In such cases, the mental or physical health of the student may suffer if they are unable to get care because their parent or guardian is unable to take the time from work.

For the student attending an in-person health appointment, their school day can be severely disrupted. Students attending appointments would certainly miss more than one class period to do so when accounting for transportation time. Moreover, depending on the timing of the appointment, the student may miss at least a half-day of instruction.

Access to telehealth appointments during the school day can be particularly beneficial to those students receiving mental health services. While some schools may have counselors on staff or other resources available to a student, those resources are often over-subscribed. If a student has been receiving mental health care from an outside provider with whom they already have established a relationship and trust, then it would be in the students' best interest to maintain care with that provider. Access to telehealth appointments during the school day could significantly decrease the amount of instruction time missed while increasing the likelihood of better mental health outcomes by permitting them to receive care from a provider already known to them.

For students to have access to telehealth providers for either mental or physical health care, we acknowledge that the parent must remain involved since they are liable for the

costs of care or for providing the insurance. Therefore, providing this resource to students would not circumvent the role of the parent in the care of the student.

Recently published reports indicate that the youth are experiencing significant mental health challenges throughout the United States and that [LGBTQIA+ students experience them at even a greater rate](#). As an organization that advocates for a safe and equitable community where all people can thrive, we see the provision of access to telehealth appointments as a benefit to all students in the state and a particular benefit to those who identify as LGBTQIA+ who may be in greater need of these resources.

Accordingly, Annapolis Pride respectfully requests a **favorable** committee report on Senate Bill 492.