

To: Members of the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee  
Members of the House Appropriations Committee  
Members of the House Ways and Means Committee

From: Morgan's Message, Inc.

RE: Education – Coaches - Mental Health Training

On behalf of Morgan's Message, we want to register our support for the *Education - Coaches - Mental Health Training* legislation, which would require training for coaches to recognize signs of mental illness and behavioral distress in student-athletes.

Morgan's Message is a non-profit organization that aims to amplify stories, resources and expertise to strengthen student-athlete mental health, build a community by and for athletes through peer-to-peer conversations, and provide a platform for advocacy.

Student-athletes can face immense pressure to succeed in their sport, which can negatively impact their mental health. According to multiple studies, college athletes have a higher risk for mental health issues than non-athletes. Additionally, the latest NCAA Student-Athlete Well-Being study reported that athletes felt only 53% of coaches take mental health concerns of their student-athletes seriously (NCAA, 2022). This likely results from coaches being ill-equipped to identify warning signs and connect struggling students with needed support.

Our organization was founded in 2020 in the wake of losing our beloved daughter, sister, friend, and teammate, Morgan Rodgers. Morgan was a vibrant D1 lacrosse player at Duke University who tragically died by suicide in July 2019 after navigating mental health challenges following a devastating knee injury. Despite putting on a happy face, Morgan suffered in silence, keeping family and friends in the dark as she battled her mental health.

In Morgan's memory, Morgan's Message strives to eliminate the stigma surrounding mental health and works to equalize the treatment of physical and mental health. We work directly with more than 4,400 high school and collegiate student-athletes, empowering them with education to share within their communities, and encouraging them as leaders and mental health advocates so that no one feels alone or loses their Morgan.

*Education - Coaches - Mental Health Training* will require the Maryland State Department of Education to develop guidelines for public schools and the Maryland

Higher Education Commission to develop guidelines for public institutions of higher education to train coaches to recognize indicators of mental illness and behavioral distress in students who participate in athletic programs in public schools and public institutions of higher education.

Public schools and public institutions of higher education that offer athletic programs would be required to provide training to coaches based on those guidelines so that coaches can better detect when a student-athlete is exhibiting symptoms of conditions like anxiety, depression, disordered eating, and suicidal ideation. It would also teach coaches best practices for approaching students compassionately and referring them to appropriate resources.

Arming coaches with the tools to spot and intervene in situations where a student is showing signs of struggle will increase help-seeking behavior on campuses and save lives. A similar bill, Section 3313.5318 - Mental health training for coaches, was recently enacted in Ohio and we hope Maryland will take similar action to support its student-athletes.

During the last two decades, suicide rates for Americans ages 10 to 24 rose 62% (CDC). *Education - Coaches - Mental Health Training*, is a common-sense measure to safeguard the wellbeing of young athletes across our state. The guidelines and training it implements will empower coaches to create a culture of health and safety for the students they mentor. On behalf of Morgan's Message, we urge a favorable report.