



**In Support  
Senate Bill No. 165  
Education, Energy, and Environment Committee  
Senator Feldman, Committee Chair**

**January 17, 2024- 3:00 pm**

Senator Feldman, members of the Education, Energy, and Environment Committee. My name is **Marcus Alston, Founder & Executive Director of Alston for Athletes. As a former Division 1 student-athlete with lived experience, I'm in support of Senate Bill 165!**

Coaches serve as a first responder to a student-athlete, they go through CPR training but they do not go through mental health training. CPR training is used in a life or death situation for a student-athlete. But a mental health crisis can be a life or death situation for a student-athlete as well, so how come coaches are not properly equipped to help out a student-athlete in crisis. In my 15 years of playing football, I don't recall a coach having to use CPR once when I couldn't count on two hands the amount of times I've seen teammates in some sort of emotional distress.

As student-athletes, we often confide in our coaches about personal things we are dealing with. But only 18% of youth coaches are confident they can support their student-athletes' mental health. And 67% of youth coaches want more training in this area (Aspen Institute). If I had a coach who was mental health certified, I could've potentially found out about my mental illness at a much earlier age as opposed to finding out about it after I graduated college.

COVID-19 can lead to PTSD symptomology, which will have lasting effects on the future generation of young student-athletes. There were approximately 20 youth deaths related to COVID-19 the past three years, while there were approximately 166 youth suicides. Now think about all the health precautions that were put in place for the youth during COVID-19 vs. what is being done for youth suicide.

There are several organizations that oppose SB165 mostly due to the unfunded mandate but there are several free training resources available for example the Student Mental Health and Suicide Prevention training from the National Federation of High Schools. The fiscal and policy note states that local revenues are minimally affected. In my opinion implementing SB165 is common sense. If coaches can find extra time to watch film and binge watch their favorite Netflix show, then they have time to complete a 2-3 hour training every few years. Isn't this something you would like to help your child? There is a much needed change for mental health in athletics and I believe SB165 is a step in the right direction! Attached in my testimony are letters of support from seven sport psychologists and eight advocacy groups including NAMI MD. For the reasons expressed, I respectfully request a favorable report on SB165. Thank you!

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: Kate Farinholt, Executive Director, National Alliance on Mental Illness Maryland

RE: Education – Coaches - Mental Health Training

On behalf of the National Alliance on Mental Illness- Maryland, I 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. National Alliance on Mental Illness Maryland and our 11 local affiliates across the state represent a statewide network of more than 45,000 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.

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. However, coaches are often not equipped to identify warning signs and connect struggling students with needed support. Undiagnosed, untreated, and inadequately treated mental illnesses significantly interfere with a student's ability to learn, grow, and develop. Because young people spend much of their productive time in school, and student athletes with their coaches, teachers and coaches should be equipped with the skills to identify indicators of mental illness and behavioral health in their students. Early intervention saves lives.

*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.

With teen suicide rates on the rise, it is crucial we do everything possible to identify students at risk and get them help. *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 National Alliance on Mental Illness Maryland, we urge a favorable report.

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: *Stephanie Rand, SKY Campus Happiness COO, a program of the International Association for Human Values*

RE: Education – Coaches - Mental Health Training

On behalf of SKY Campus Happiness, I 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. SKY Campus Happiness is a comprehensive well-being and resilience program designed to help students, faculty and staff achieve their fullest potential.

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. However, coaches are often not equipped to identify warning signs and connect struggling students with needed support. SKY Campus is active on over 118 campuses where we work with students, faculty and staff to provide low barrier well being tools. The stories and struggles we hear from faculty and students show us the need for more mental health training for decision makers in education.

*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.

With teen suicide rates on the rise, it is crucial we do everything possible to identify students at risk and get them help. *Education - Coaches - Mental Health Training* is a common-sense measure to safeguard the well-being of young athletes across our state.

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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: *Elan Gepner-Dales, Executive Director SKY Schools USA, International Association for Human Values*

RE: K12-Education – Coaches - Mental Health Training

On behalf of SKY Schools, I 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. SKY Schools and the International Association for Human Values foster the daily practice of human values – a sense of connectedness and respect for all people and the natural environment, an attitude of non-violence, and an ethic of social service. Our programs enhance clarity of mind, shift attitudes and behaviors, and develop leaders and communities that are resilient, responsible, and inspired.

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. However, coaches are often not equipped to identify warning signs and connect struggling students with needed support.

In our work with hundreds of K-12 schools across the US, along with schools in Maryland, we are acutely aware of the challenges facing our student athletes. Our primary delivery of mental fitness programming takes place within PE classes, and we find the student athletes are often among the most resistant to the work, because of their bias and concepts around mental health, and their concepts and identities as “strong athletes.” The PE teachers are often their coaches, and their biases, concepts, and perceptions on mental health play a big part in creating safety or lack thereof for their student athletes. We consistently see the depth of the relationship between the student athletes and their coaches, where coaches often play a close to parental role in many students’ lives, and get a window into their personality and relationships which other educators don’t always access. In schools where we’ve run wellness program specifically with the sports teams, from boys football to girls volleyball, track, tennis and lacrosse, we’ve seen that both the powerful capacity of mental health and performance training to benefit student athletes, and how critical the coach is in setting the tone and holding the space. It is key that coaches be educator with the importance of mental

health training, and equipped with the tools to identify need and support their scholar athletes.

*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.

With teen suicide rates on the rise, it is crucial we do everything possible to identify students at risk and get them help. *Education - Coaches - Mental Health Training* is a common-sense measure to safeguard the well-being 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 SKY Schools and the International Association for Human Values, we urge a favorable report.



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: Ryan Cain, Executive Director, Fund Recovery

RE: Education – Coaches - Mental Health Training

On behalf of Fund Recovery, I 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. Fund Recovery is a nonprofit organization designed to help people with financial assistance for mental health or substance misuse services. Our Fund Recovery team has been able to assist with 1.9 million dollars granted, 800 (+) individual scholarships given, and has provided people with information about resources or providers nationally on all levels of care. We host several fundraisers each year to raise awareness, and reduce the stigma regarding mental health.

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. However, coaches are often not equipped to identify warning signs and connect struggling students with needed support. Since 2011, Fund Recovery exists to break the cycle of mental health issues by filling in the funding gap between someone who is struggling and their recovery. Our mission is to provide funding to directly support those combating mental health issues who cannot otherwise afford help, either by supporting the afflicted people directly or by assisting those who care for them. Fund Recovery provides financial assistance, individual scholarships, grants, and resources for addiction and mental health services for people seeking change.

*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.

With teen suicide rates on the rise, it is crucial we do everything possible to identify students at risk and get them help. *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 Fund Recovery, we urge a favorable report.



January 15, 2024

The Honorable Brian Feldman  
Education, Energy, & the Environment Committee  
2 West – Senate Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Support – Senate Bill 165: Education - Coaches - Mental Health Training

Dear Chairman Feldman and Honorable Members of the Committee:

The Maryland Psychiatric Society (MPS) and the Washington Psychiatric Society (WPS) are state medical organizations whose physician members specialize in diagnosing, treating, and preventing mental illnesses, including substance use disorders. Formed more than sixty-five years ago to support the needs of psychiatrists and their patients, both organizations work to ensure available, accessible, and comprehensive quality mental health resources for all Maryland citizens; and strive through public education to dispel the stigma and discrimination of those suffering from a mental illness. As the district branches of the American Psychiatric Association covering the state of Maryland, MPS and WPS represent over 1000 psychiatrists and physicians currently in psychiatric training.

MPS/WPS strongly support Senate Bill 165: Education - Coaches - Mental Health Training. Mental health first aid is a training program designed to help individuals identify, understand, and respond to someone who may be experiencing a mental health or substance use challenge. Coaches have an important role in the lives of their athletes, and they can play a crucial role in helping them manage mental health challenges. Therefore, coaches should be taught to recognize indicators of mental illness and behavioral distress in students.

Coaches are often the first point of contact for young athletes struggling with mental health issues. By providing coaches with the knowledge and skills needed to identify and respond to mental health challenges, they can better support their athletes and help them access the resources they need. Mental health training can help coaches recognize the signs and symptoms of mental health challenges, provide initial support, and refer athletes to appropriate resources, such as mental health professionals. Coaches can also learn how to create a supportive and inclusive environment for their athletes, which can promote positive mental health.

Overall, providing coaches with mental health training can help them become better equipped to support their athletes' mental health and well-being. Therefore, for all the reasons above, MPS and WPS ask the committee for a favorable report on SB 165. If you have any questions with regard to this testimony, please feel free to contact Thomas Tompsett Jr. at [tommy.tompsett@mdlobbyist.com](mailto:tommy.tompsett@mdlobbyist.com).

Respectfully submitted,  
The Maryland Psychiatric Society and the Washington Psychiatric Society  
Legislative Action Committee

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: Ashley Zapata, PsyD., Director, Sport + Personal Performance, SOL Performance + Consulting

RE: Education – Coaches - Mental Health Training

I am writing in support of the *Education - Coaches - Mental Health Training* bill. As a skilled and dedicated mental health, sports performance, and wellness professional specializing in sport and performance psychology, I am asking for your consideration and a vote in support of this legislation, which requires the development of a framework for all coaches to receive training on student mental health.

As a passionate advocate for the well-being of student-athletes, I firmly believe that this initiative has the potential to create a transformative impact on the lives of countless athletes.

Participating in sports not only fosters physical health but also plays a pivotal role in shaping one's mental and emotional well-being. Student-athletes face a unique set of challenges, balancing the demands of academics with the pressures of competition. It is essential that those responsible for guiding them through this journey possess the knowledge and skills to recognize and address mental health concerns.

Coaches, being influential figures in the lives of student-athletes, have a profound opportunity to contribute positively to their overall development. By providing mental health training for coaches, we empower them with the tools to identify signs of emotional distress, stress, or mental health issues in their charges. **This legislation is not just about enhancing the skills of coaches; it is about creating a support system that can make a critical difference in the lives of student-athletes who may be silently struggling.**

Training coaches in mental health awareness and intervention will enable them to establish open lines of communication with student-athletes, fostering an environment in which mental health concerns can be addressed without stigma. Coaches will be better equipped to recognize when a player may need additional support, and they can serve as a bridge, connecting these individuals with the appropriate resources.

Moreover, this legislation aligns with our collective commitment to breaking down the barriers surrounding mental health conversations. By integrating mental health training into coaching education programs, we send a powerful message to our youth that mental well-being is just as important as physical fitness. This proactive approach not only addresses the immediate needs of student-athletes but also contributes to destigmatizing mental health concerns on a broader scale.

In conclusion, I urge you to champion this legislation that places mental health training at the forefront of coaching education. By doing so, we can create a nurturing and supportive environment for our student-athletes, ensuring that they not only excel in their respective sports but also thrive mentally and emotionally. Together, let us invest in the well-being of athletes, fostering an athlete community that is not only physically strong but resilient in mind and spirit.

Maryland has an opportunity to take the lead in advocating for all student-athletes and recognizing the importance of their mental health. Knowledge is power, and empowering all of our coaches with training to recognize our students who may be struggling benefits everyone. Help us open dialogues. Let's be able to talk!

Please support the passage of *Education- Coaches – Mental Health Training*. Thank you for your consideration.

*Ashley M. Zapata*

Ashley M. Zapata, PsyD  
Director, Sport+Personal Development  
SOL Performance+Consulting  
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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: Justin Jacques, Ph.D., LPC., Founder, Human Theory Group

RE: Education – Coaches - Mental Health Training

On behalf of the Human Theory Group, I 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. At the Human Theory Group, we strive to diagnose and treat mental illness through mental health counseling and sports performance consultation. A great majority of our clients are current and former student athletes.

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. However, coaches are often not equipped to identify warning signs and connect struggling students with needed support. At Human Theory Group we have seen a large increase in student athletes seeking mental health counseling. This is due to help seeking behavior increases and stigma decreasing in our culture, but also as a result of the emotional tsunami that has occurred as a result of the pandemic. Student athletes are struggling more than ever with connecting with each other, loneliness, and feelings of hopelessness. It has become exceedingly important that coaches are trained in recognizing the signs and symptoms of mental health issues in their athletes so they can be referred to the proper resources in their communities.

*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.

With teen suicide rates on the rise, it is crucial we do everything possible to identify students at risk and get them help. *Education - Coaches - Mental Health Training* is a common-sense measure to safeguard the well-being 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 the Human Theory Group, we urge a favorable report.

Sincerely,

Justin Jacques Ph.D., LPC, ACS, CAC II CEAP, NCC

Pronouns: he/him/his

Founder / Mental Health Coach Human Theory Group LLC

Tel: 303-513-3391

[justinjacques@humantheorygroup.com](mailto:justinjacques@humantheorygroup.com)

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: Justin Jacques, Ph.D., LPC., Founder, Human Theory Group | Chief Clinical Officer,  
Technotherapy

RE: Education – Coaches - Mental Health Training

I am writing in support of the *Education - Coaches - Mental Health Training* bill. As a licensed mental health counselor and mental performance coach, I am asking for your consideration and a vote in support of this legislation, which requires the development of a framework for all coaches to receive training on student mental health.

I'd like to share my personal story with you so that you understand why the passage of this legislation is so important to us as athletes. As a student athlete who grew up in Iowa and played six high school sports, there were no resources for coaches to understand mental health as it related to athletes like me. As an adult I battled depression and anxiety as a result of my ADHD and my Dyslexia. If my coaches had had a better understanding of what signs and symptoms to look for regarding my mental health, it would have been tremendously helpful for me to get treatment earlier in my life. Without the treatment my sports career was cut short in college and my depression and anxiety worsened after college to a severe state. It almost derailed my life permanently. I finally sought help and it changed my life. It is very important that high school coaches have the skills and abilities to recognize and help student athletes with their mental health concerns to avoid undue suffering and ultimately the countless suicides that occur each year in this country.

Maryland has an opportunity to take the lead in advocating for all student-athletes and recognizing the importance of their mental health. Knowledge is power, and empowering all of our coaches with training to recognize our students who may be struggling benefits everyone. Help us open dialogues. Let's be able to talk!

Please support the passage of *Education- Coaches – Mental Health Training*. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Justin Jacques Ph.D., LPC, ACS, CAC II CEAP, NCC  
Pronouns: he/him/his  
Founder / Mental Health Coach Human Theory Group LLC  
Tel: 303-513-3391  
justinjacques@humantheorygroup.com



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: Marc Felizzi, Associate Professor, Millersville University

RE: Education – Coaches - Mental Health Training

I am writing in support of the *Education - Coaches - Mental Health Training* bill. As a Sport Social Worker, member of the United States Olympic/Paralympic Mental Health Provider Network, and the Alliance for Social Workers in Sports, as well as Coordinator of a dual degree MSW/MEd in Sport Management program, I am asking for your consideration and a vote in support of this legislation, which requires the development of a framework for all coaches to receive training on student mental health.

I'd like to share my thoughts regarding the need to address athletes and mental health. The need to address athlete mental health in our society has never been more evident. The role of sports in North American society is large, lucrative, and rife with pressure, emotionally and physically. Mental Health professionals, such as social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists and counselors can be found in many areas where counseling, therapy or social skills development and education are indicated. Social workers also assist student athletes at the high school and university levels in both the United States and Canada (NASWIS, 2017) in a number of areas, including the recruitment process to collegiate or professional athletics.

Maryland has an opportunity to take the lead in advocating for all student-athletes and recognizing the importance of their mental health. Knowledge is power, and empowering all of our coaches with training to recognize our students who may be struggling benefits everyone. Help us open dialogues. Let's be able to talk!

Please support the passage of *Education- Coaches – Mental Health Training*. Thank you for your consideration.

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: Kym & Mark Hilinski, Founders, Hilinski's Hope

RE: Education – Coaches - Mental Health Training

On behalf of Hilinski's Hope, 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. We lost our son, Tyler Hilinski, to suicide on January 16, 2018. Tyler was a quarterback at Washington State University and we didn't have any idea he was struggling. We believe the stigma attached to talking about mental health and illness runs so strong among student-athletes. It's that stigma that may have prevented Tyler from reaching out and asking for mental health support; perhaps in fear of appearing weak, losing playing time, and possibly no longer being viewed as a leader. 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. However, coaches are often not equipped to identify warning signs and connect struggling students with needed support. Tyler's coach at Washington State University was Coach Mike Leach, who sadly passed away in 2022. Coach Leach and Tyler were very close and Mike shared with us that out of all the players on his roster, he would have placed Tyler at the bottom of those he thought would pass by suicide. Coach Leach and Tyler's position coaches and staff didn't know how to recognize the signs of mental health struggles because they were never taught what to indicators to look for. We created Hilinski's Hope to support the mental health of student-athletes, in the hopes to prevent another "Tyler" from passing by suicide and/or suffering in silence.

*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.

With teen suicide rates on the rise, it is crucial we do everything possible to identify students at risk and get them help. *Education - Coaches - Mental Health Training* is a common-sense measure to safeguard the well-being 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 Hilinkis's Hope, we urge a favorable report.

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: Kristina Miller, VP & Director, Don't Make It Weird, Inc

RE: Education – Coaches - Mental Health Training

On behalf of Don't Make It Weird, Inc (501(c)3) I 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. At Don't Make It Weird, Inc, (DMIW.org) we are working to break the stigma surrounding mental illness by offering support, education, resources, and community service awareness events.

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. However, coaches are often not equipped to identify warning signs and connect struggling students with needed support. Harry Miller, a football player at The Ohio State University, publicly retired from football in March 2022 due to his declining mental health. His retirement has touched the hearts of athletes and non-athletes alike as this crisis continues to decimate families across our country. Harry's job instantly shifted from Football Star to a much more important role: Mental Health Advocate. Fortunately, Harry was in a place that had the infrastructure to support him in crisis with multiple full-time sports psychologists on staff he immediately received the help he desperately needed. This is not the case in most situations. We have seen first hand the challenges Student-Athletes face that are unique to them, pressure, expectations, injuries, travel, academics, 15 hour days... each part adds to the overwhelming stress a student-athlete faces daily. Sadly, we know of players in crisis at other well known P-5 institutions whose struggles were not recognized, they were labeled as being lazy, and subsequently removed from their teams. It is vital that coaches are equipped with the training to recognize signs of mental illness and behavioral distress in student-athletes so help is received in a timely and effective manner. We must not stop, we can not stop until we have exhausted every possible opportunity to save a student-athletes life. Coaches should be the first line of defense when discussing the protection of the student-athletes they are in charge of daily. NOT ONE MORE!

*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.

With teen suicide rates on the rise, it is crucial we do everything possible to identify students at risk and get them help. *Education - Coaches - Mental Health Training* is a common-sense measure to safeguard the well-being 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 Don't Make It Weird, we urge a favorable report.

***Kristina S. Miller, CPS-P***

Kristina S. Miller, CPS-P  
Don't Make It Weird, Inc 501(c)3  
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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: Robert Owens, Ed.D, CMPC., Founder, Resolute Performance

RE: Education – Coaches - Mental Health Training

I am writing in support of the *Education - Coaches - Mental Health Training* bill. As a licensed clinical mental health therapist and an elite performance coach and leader within the field of applied sport psychology, I am asking for your consideration and a vote in support of this legislation, which requires the development of a framework for all coaches to receive training on student mental health.

Over the last few years, I have worked with many athletes who have experienced mental health distress given the performance demands of their respective sports. Oftentimes, the athlete's stress was compounded by and/or directly related to the coach-athlete relationship. Talent can only be cultivated in environments where the athlete's overall well-being is not only considered but centered. That is why the passage of this legislation is so important to athletes and to performance coaches and mental health professionals, like me, who support them.

Maryland has an opportunity to take the lead in advocating for all student-athletes and recognizing the importance of their mental health. Knowledge is power. Training will empower coaches to recognize student-athletes in distress and help them create cultures of performance excellence that will elevate athletes to reach their full potential.

Please support the passage of *Education- Coaches – Mental Health Training*. Thank you for your consideration.

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: Robert Owens, Ed.D, CMPC., Founder, Resolute Performance, PLLC

RE: Education – Coaches - Mental Health Training

On behalf of Resolute Performance, PLLC, I 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. At Resolute, we help individuals and teams to leverage and reach goals related to high performance. We help organizational clients to create an ethos of peak performance and install that ethos into the organization's mission, vision, values, and standards of behavior.

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. However, coaches are often not equipped to identify warning signs and connect struggling students with needed support. At Resolute Performance, we work with coaches to foster mastery performance climates for their athletes and help them strengthen relationships with their athletes through education, honest and open dialogue, and cultural humility. Being aware of an athlete's mental status and understanding the relationship between mental health and performance is one of our core values.

*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.

With teen suicide rates on the rise, it is crucial we do everything possible to identify students at risk and get them help. *Education - Coaches - Mental Health Training* is a common-sense measure to safeguard the well-being 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 Resolute Performance, we urge a favorable report.



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: Brad Bryk, PsyD., Clinical Psychologist and Sport Psychologist

RE: Education – Coaches - Mental Health Training

I am writing in support of the *Education - Coaches - Mental Health Training* bill. As a licensed Clinical and Sport Psychologist, I am asking for your consideration and a vote in support of this legislation, which requires the development of a framework for all coaches to receive training on student mental health.

In my role as a Clinical and Sport Psychologist working in the private practice setting, I am uniquely aware of coaches' role in supporting athlete wellness. Student-athletes are at greater risk for several mental health diagnoses than their same-aged peers. While numerous reasons can be identified, perhaps the most obvious is the added stress athletes face due to the competitive atmosphere and time commitment demanded by sport. Unfortunately, coaches are rarely trained to identify warning signs of mental health distress, nor are they informed on how to connect struggling students with needed support.

*Education - Coaches - Mental Health Training* bill will require the Maryland State Department of Education and the Maryland Higher Education Commission to develop guidelines for public schools and institutions of higher education to train coaches to recognize indicators of mental illness and behavioral distress in student athletes. 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 signs of mental health distress, including but not limited to 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. The coach would not be expected to provide mental health care; rather, they would be responsible for communicating their concern to the athlete and connecting the athlete to appropriate resources. With teen suicide rates on the rise, we must do everything possible to identify and support at-risk students. *Education - Coaches - Mental Health Training* is a common-sense measure to safeguard the well-being of young athletes across our state. The guidelines and training it implements will empower coaches to create a health and safety culture for the students they mentor.

Maryland has an opportunity to take the lead in advocating for all student-athletes and recognizing the importance of their mental health. Knowledge is power, and empowering all of our coaches with training to recognize our students who may be struggling benefits everyone. Help us open dialogues. Let's be able to talk!

Please support the passage of *Education- Coaches – Mental Health Training*. Thank you for your consideration.

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: Marissa Norman, PsyD., Sport Psychologist, Top Form Psychology

RE: Education – Coaches - Mental Health Training

I am writing in support of the *Education - Coaches - Mental Health Training* bill. As a Certified Mental Performance Consultant (CMPC), Licensed Psychologist, and PSYPACT Clinician, working with student-athletes, coaches, administrators, and staff within NCAA institutions, high schools, and professional organizations. I am asking for your consideration and a vote in support of this legislation, which requires the development of a framework for all coaches to receive training on student mental health.

As someone who works in the field of sport psychology, I have seen firsthand how educating coaches on mental health can save lives. By learning about the signs and symptoms of mental illness and how to support the well-being of their student-athletes, coaches will be equipped with the necessary resources and confidence to identify concerns and help their athletes find the appropriate support. On the other hand, I have also witnessed the negative impact of coaches who lack understanding of mental health. Ignorance is not always bliss, and even something as simple as requiring mental health training for coaches can make a huge difference. This sends a message to student-athletes that they are valued and supported, which is incredibly important for their overall well-being.

Maryland has an opportunity to take the lead in advocating for all student-athletes and recognizing the importance of their mental health. Knowledge is power, and empowering all of our coaches with training to recognize our students who may be struggling benefits everyone. Help us open dialogues. Let's be able to talk!

Please support the passage of *Education- Coaches – Mental Health Training*. Thank you for your consideration.

Best,

Dr. Marissa Norman