



SB492 PUBLIC SCHOOLS – STUDENT TELEHEALTH APPOINTMENTS – POLICY AND ACCESS

February 28, 2024

EDUCATION, ENERGY AND THE ENVIRONMENT

SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS

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Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS) supports with amendments **SB492 Public Schools – Student Telehealth Appointments – Policy and Access**. This bill requires each county board of education to establish a policy to accommodate students who need to participate in telehealth appointments scheduled during the school day. The bill requires that this policy require each middle and high school to designate a space for student telehealth appointments that is a private space in the school, has internet access, includes at least one seating option with a flat surface and electrical outlet to accommodate a laptop, and is not a bathroom or closet. The policy is also required to implement measures to ensure the safety and privacy of a student participating in a telehealth appointment. Moreover, the bill requires each county board to ensure that the local school system published the policy in the student handbook and makes personnel aware of student telehealth policy objectives and requirements. Finally, the bill states that nothing in the bill shall be construed to require a school to construct an addition or a new space to a school building to provide a private space to comply with the student telehealth policy.

In the wake of the global COVID-19 pandemic, health care providers have shifted to providing some services virtually via telehealth. The provision of health services virtually is convenient to students, families, and health care providers. As such, AACPS supports the development of telehealth guidance by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), in collaboration with the Maryland Department of Health (MDH), in order to ensure that telehealth can be provided safely within academic settings. However, AACPS has concerns regarding the specific requirements of this bill to provide students access to telehealth services in public schools without sufficient guidance or guardrails, and respectfully requests that the bill be amended accordingly and that the effective date of the bill be delayed until after MSDE guidance on telehealth in public schools is available to local education agencies.

AACPS believes that without guidance from MSDE on how to effectively and safely implement access to private telehealth appointments during the school day, SB492 will result in logistical and liability challenges for local education agencies. These challenges include ensuring students are supervised while having equitable access to private telehealth services and incorporating this practice in a way that will not adversely impact the instructional day for students. Furthermore, this bill places an additional strain on school facilities which are already overburdened. Many of our schools currently do not have sufficient private meeting space to meet the demands of student services staff, school-based mental health clinicians, and academic interventionists. The requirement that schools also make private space available for student telehealth will further limit the private space available in schools for use both by staff and students.

While AACPS recognizes the importance of promoting the positive mental and physical health of our students, AACPS believes that additional guidance and time are needed beyond this legislation to ensure that telehealth can be provided appropriately and safely within the school setting.

Accordingly, AACPS respectfully requests a **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS** committee report on SB492.