

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: The Hidden Opponent

RE: Education – Coaches - Mental Health Training

On behalf of The Hidden Opponent, 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. The Hidden Opponent is a student athlete-led organization that works to provide mental health resources and programming to student athletes with the hope of reducing the stigma surrounding asking for help.

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. Our organization was founded by former University of Southern California volleyball star Victoria Garrick Browne. She shared her experiences with mental health conditions in a TedTalk at USC in 2017, and began advocating for student athletes' mental health and positive body image. She founded The Hidden Opponent that works to advocate, educate, and support student athletes through programming for both athletes and their coaches.

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 The Hidden Opponent, we urge a favorable report.