



Board of Education of Howard County
Testimony Submitted to the Maryland Senate,
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
February 28, 2024



Board of Education
of Howard County

SB0492: FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS
Public Schools - Student Telehealth Appointments - Policy and Access

The Board of Education of Howard County (the Board) supports **SB0492 Public Schools - Student Telehealth Appointments - Policy and Access** with amendments to shift the bill to a study or workgroup.

SB0492 requires local school systems to develop a policy and accommodate telehealth appointments for students at the middle and high school level. "Telehealth" is defined under the bill as a mode of delivering health care services through the use of telecommunications technologies by a health care practitioner to a patient at a different physical location than the health care practitioner. In order to accommodate these appointments, schools must designate a space that is private, has internet access, includes at least one seating option with a flat surface and electrical outlet nearby to accommodate placement of a laptop, and is not a bathroom or closet. School systems must publish the student telehealth policy in the student handbook and provide training to school personnel on student telehealth policy objectives and requirements.

In Howard County, the Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) currently operates 11 school-based wellness centers in conjunction with the Howard County Health Department, which can include telehealth appointments in the health room with the school nurse facilitating the visit. Mental health telehealth appointments are currently only allowed at Homewood, where a School-Based Mental Health Program clinician and school staff must be nearby.

SB0492 sets up scenarios where appointments made by parents for any number of somatic or mental health concerns would happen during the school day. The administrative burden on the school would include coordinating appointments which may overlap, as well as ensuring students have access to technology and platforms that connect to their specific doctor/provider. Currently, parents are asked to sign students out of school when taking such appointments as there are also concerns with privacy of a student's health information. In a worse case scenario, a student who has an appointment may become overwhelmed, confused, or otherwise need parent or guardian support when no one is in the room with them at the time. If requiring additional staff to monitor each appointment, the bill would impact the already overburdened health and mental health staff working in our schools.

While well intentioned, logistics for this topic needs further consideration before legislating a mandate as called for under SB0492. The bill should be amended to establish a study or workgroup of this important topic with input from impacted stakeholders.

With these amendments, we urge a FAVORABLE report of SB0492 from this Committee.

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