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Senator Hettleman Testimony- SB165
Education – Coaches – Mental Health Training

Whether you are a parent, an aunt or uncle, a grandparent, or even someone who follows the news, you are likely well aware of the mental health challenges facing our youth today. Mental health issues among young people have only increased over the last few decades, reaching levels considered by experts to be a public health crisis. According to the Mental Health Association of Maryland (MHAMD), 1 in 5 children and adolescents suffer with mental health problems. These mental health conditions come with real consequences later in life, impacting physical health and limiting opportunities. Despite the seriousness of this problem, the MHAMD says almost two-thirds of young people are not getting the help they need.

Young adults are at particularly high risk. This transitional period is a stressful developmental phase, now accompanied with concerns about climate change, gun violence, rising costs of goods and services and social media. An alarming 73% of college students reported moderate or severe psychological distress in 2021, according to the American Psychiatry Association.

Despite the efforts of universities and colleges to provide more comprehensive mental health services to their students, two-thirds of college students have not accessed these campus resources, as reported by [a recent survey](#) conducted by the American Psychiatry Association. Student athletes are not immune to this issue. A recent [report](#) in the International Journal of Environmental Research & Public Health has found that one in four student athletes are at risk of depression. This bill is a needed step towards making mental health care more accessible for this at-risk group.

The bill requires the Maryland State Department of Education and the Maryland Higher Education Commission, in collaboration with partners, to develop guidelines for public schools and higher education institutions to train coaches to recognize indicators of mental illness and behavioral distress in students. This presents a new mechanism to reach student athletes who may be struggling but are not being reached by existing mental health resources in schools. Coaches often serve as trusted figures for student athletes who spend lots of time with students outside of formal academic settings and are therefore uniquely positioned to identify warning signs and connect their athletes with needed services. These resources can also serve as a new and different way to monitor student wellbeing more broadly.

The adolescents and young adults of Maryland deserve high-quality, accessible mental health services and support from the adults in their lives who can connect them to the help they need. Though coaches are highly motivated to serve in this role and 67% of coaches surveyed want training on mental health, only 18% felt highly confident in their ability to link athletes to mental health resources, according to a national survey of coaches from The Aspen Institute. We must do more to support the coaches that often serve as lifelines for our student athletes, so that no one is left behind. This bill advances that important goal. Thank you for your support.