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Legislative District 47
Prince George's County

PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

Executive Nominations Committee

Education, Energy and the
Environment Committee



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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

January 17, 2024

Senate Bill 122 - Education – Provision of Maryland Youth Crisis Hotline Telephone Number – Alteration

Dear Colleagues,

I am pleased to present **Senate Bill 122 - Education – Provision of Maryland Youth Crisis Hotline Telephone Number – Alteration**, which seeks to enhance the provision of mental health resources for Maryland youth through the alteration of the Maryland Youth Crisis Hotline telephone number on public school ID cards for grades 6-12. The proposed legislation aims to replace the reference to the Youth Crisis Hotline with the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, ensuring that life-saving information is readily accessible to students encountering a mental health crisis or contemplating suicide.

Under current law, each county board of education is mandated to furnish middle and high school students with the contact details of the Maryland Youth Crisis Hotline in their school handbooks and on their student identification cards. It is imperative to recognize the historical context that led to the creation of SB122. House Bill 973 in 2010 took a significant step forward by mandating the inclusion of the Maryland Youth Crisis Hotline on public school ID cards for grades 6-12. This legislation aimed to provide immediate access to mental health support for students in crisis. Subsequently, Senate Bill 405 in 2021 extended this initiative to higher education settings, acknowledging the need for continued mental health support as students transition to post-secondary education.

The most recent estimates from the Maryland Department of Health, for the academic years 2021-2022, underscore the urgency of addressing mental health concerns among our youth. Shockingly, over 26.8% of Maryland middle schoolers have seriously considered suicide in their lifetime, with 19.5% having made a plan, and 11% attempting. These figures have increased significantly since 2018, particularly among girls and Black and Hispanic/Latino students. Additionally, 39.2% of Maryland high schoolers have experienced such profound sadness or hopelessness that it impacted their usual activities, and 20.6% seriously contemplated suicide in the past year, revealing a troubling trend of escalating mental health crises.

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Following the adoption of 988 as the nation's mental health hotline, the call volume for the Maryland Youth Crisis Hotline (1-800-422-0009) has seen a decline. The hotline's original number is now utilized by the Maryland Department of Health as the primary contact for the state's substance use disorder hotline, with the Department designating 988 as the primary resource for mental health issues.

Providers highlight that 988 is more preferred by youth, primarily due to its capacity for text chat and online chat, whereas the Maryland Youth Crisis Hotline allows for calls only. This feature of text and online chat is particularly beneficial for students with disabilities, including those who are deaf and cannot easily communicate via speech.

Additionally, the simplicity of the three-digit 988 number is crucial in emergency situations, ensuring a quicker response and reducing potential barriers that might arise from the memorization of longer hotline numbers.

This bill would not add additional costs to schools, as they would not be required to reprint ID cards or handbooks that are already in use. Rather, schools must add 988 when new ID cards and handbooks are printed for incoming students in future school years.

Our commitment to the well-being of Maryland's youth extends beyond the classroom, and SB122 is a crucial step towards creating a culture that prioritizes mental health support.

In conclusion, I urge you to support SB122 as a vital piece of legislation that addresses the growing mental health crisis among Maryland's youth. By ensuring the easy access of 988 through school ID cards, we take a significant step forward in safeguarding the well-being of our students.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter. I urge the committee to give a **favorable** report for **Senate Bill 122 - Education – Provision of Maryland Youth Crisis Hotline Telephone Number – Alteration**.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Malcolm Augustine".

Senator Malcolm Augustine