

February 28, 2024

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and distinguished members of the Education, Energy and the Environment Committee,

NAMI Maryland and our 11 local affiliates across the state represent a network of more than 58,000 families, individuals, community-based organizations, and service providers. NAMI Maryland is a 501(c)(3) non-profit dedicated to providing education, support, and advocacy for people living with mental illnesses, their families, and the wider community.

NAMI MD acknowledges that serious shortages exist in the mental health professional workforce. We call on our state leaders to take immediate action to end the workforce shortage—particularly in children’s mental health services.

Undiagnosed, untreated, and inadequately treated mental illnesses significantly interfere with a student’s ability to learn, to grow, and to develop. Because children spend much of their productive time in school and services can be integrated into their regular daily routine, NAMI MD believes that both public and private elementary, middle, and high schools should provide and/or facilitate and sustain provision of appropriate mental health services, supports, and appropriate accommodations.

By removing barriers such as transportation, scheduling conflicts and stigma, school-based mental health services can help students access needed services during the school-day. Early identification and effective treatment for children and their families can make a difference in the lives of children with mental health conditions. We must take steps that enable all schools to increase access to appropriate mental health services. Delays in treatment lead to worsened conditions that are harder — and costlier — to treat.

1 in 6 US youth aged 6-17 experience a mental health disorder each year. 57,000 Marylanders aged 12-17 have depression. 45.5% of Marylanders aged 12-17 who have depression did not receive any care in the last year. By creating incentive to recruit school psychologists (and individuals who are seeking to become school psychologists) through professional development opportunities, reimbursement for professional conferences, and offering coverage of fees charged by the National Association of School Psychologists for certification, we are addressing not only the serious workforce shortage we are facing, but we are investing in our school-aged children.

When we invest in children’s mental health to make sure they can get the right care at the right time, we improve the lives of children, youth, and families — and our communities.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable report.

Kathryn S. Farinholt
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