

January 17, 2024

Chairwoman Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and distinguished members of the Ways and Means Committee,

The National Alliance on Mental Illness, Maryland and our 11 local affiliates across the state represent a statewide network of more than 58,000 families, individuals, community-based organizations, and service providers. NAMI Maryland is a non-profit that is dedicated to providing education, support, and advocacy for persons with mental illnesses, their families and the wider community.

NAMI supports public policies and laws that enable all schools, public and private, to increase access to appropriate mental health services. Undiagnosed, untreated, or inadequately treated mental illnesses in children can significantly interfere with a student's ability to learn, grow and develop. Since children spend much of their productive time in educational settings, schools offer a unique opportunity for early identification, prevention, and interventions that serve students where they already are.

Support, education, and advocacy programs should be available and accessible for students and educators. We applaud Delegate Guyton for encouraging schools to offer programming that educates on mental wellness and/or peer mentoring. NAMI MD encourages the utilization of NAMI programming, including Family-to-Family, Peer-to-Peer, NAMI Basics, and NAMI: Ending the Silence, which is designed specifically for middle and high school students, school staff, and parents or guardians, to teach about the signs and symptoms of mental health conditions, how to recognize early warning signs, and the importance of acknowledging those warning signs. In addition, we recognize the importance of peer support. With dedication and unity, there is enormous strength.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable report.