



**Testimony in support of  
House Bill 522: Public Schools – Student Telehealth Appointments – Policy and Access**

**Ways and Means Committee**

**Position: Favorable**

February 7th, 2024

Strong Schools Maryland is a network of education advocates dedicated to ensuring the full funding and faithful implementation of the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future. **Strong Schools Maryland urges a favorable vote on House Bill 522: Public Schools – Student Telehealth Appointments – Policy and Access.**

The Blueprint for Maryland’s Future envisions a World-Class system of public schools for our state’s students. This involves a significant investment in behavioral and mental health services and supports, including the expansion of community schools in the State, the creation of the Consortium on Coordinated Community-Based Supports, and increased school based health center funding. This bill supports the work of the Blueprint by addressing student health needs during school hours.

House Bill 522:

- Requires local school boards to establish a policy to accommodate students if they have a telehealth appointment during the school day;
- Requires each middle and high school to designate a safe, private space for a student to attend a telehealth appointment, but *does not* require any new construction;
- Promotes equitable access to care by helping families that do not have the time or capacity to take off from work to ensure their child attends a telehealth appointment; and
- Ensures privacy and protection for LGBTQ+ students who wish to get help, but may not feel comfortable or safe with a parent listening to their telehealth appointment.

Our country is in the midst of a national youth mental health crisis. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reports that while there have been considerable measures taken to address adult mental health issues post-pandemic, there are often considerable gaps in

capacity to serve youth and families.<sup>1</sup> The Annie E. Casey Foundation's Kids Count data shows that in the 2020 to 2021 school year, 24% Maryland children had one or more emotional, behavioral, or developmental condition<sup>2</sup>. Further, LGBTQ+ students are more likely to experience mental health challenges, but less likely to receive help. One survey found that 60% of LGBTQ youth who wanted mental health care in 2022 were not able to get it.<sup>3</sup>

Left unaddressed, students with mental health challenges can experience multiple negative outcomes, including trouble making friends, learning, concentrating, and completing work, as well as poor grades, absences, suspension, expulsion, and suicide.<sup>4</sup> This bill expands opportunities for students to get help, without requiring parents to take off from work to take their children to appointments.

The Blueprint speaks to an investment in preemptively and responsively addressing school community behavioral and mental health needs. Thus the crucial need to provide students with the space to do so.

**For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on House Bill 522.**

*For more information, contact Riya Gupta at [riya@strongschoolsmaryland.org](mailto:riya@strongschoolsmaryland.org)*

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<sup>1</sup> [U.S. HHS](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Anne E. Casey Foundation](#)

<sup>3</sup> [The Trevor Project](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Groves Learning Institute](#)