



March 7, 2024

House Ways & Means Committee

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT

*HB 1372 - Health and Taxation - Digital Social Media Services
and the Mental Health Care Fund for Children and Youth*

Behavioral Health System Baltimore (BHSB) is a nonprofit organization that serves as the local behavioral health authority (LBHA) for Baltimore City. BHSB works to increase access to a full range of quality behavioral health (mental health and substance use) services and advocates for innovative approaches to prevention, early intervention, treatment and recovery for individuals, families, and communities. Baltimore City represents nearly 35 percent of the public behavioral health system in Maryland, serving over 100,000 people with mental illness and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as “behavioral health”) annually.

Behavioral Health System Baltimore supports HB 1372 - Health and Taxation - Digital Social Media Services and the Mental Health Care Fund for Children and Youth. This measure would raise needed funds to improve access to mental health care for children and youth. Wealthy social media corporations can afford it and ought to contribute to improving the mental health of Maryland’s young people.

The mental health and wellbeing of children and youth in Maryland have been in decline for years and has now reached unprecedented levels. One in four Maryland middle school students report seriously considering suicide; one in five have made a suicide plan; and more than one in ten have attempted suicide.¹ Feelings of anxiety, depression, loneliness, and hopelessness are widespread and more common than ever. Our young people are clearly struggling and need support.

Social media use is likely contributing to this mental health crisis among children and youth. There is ample evidence that social media can harm the mental health and well-being of young people and that our children and youth are almost universally using it. More than a third of young people report using social media constantly.²

HB1372 is a common-sense approach to require billion-dollar social media companies who have grown wealthy thanks in part to widespread use by young people to contribute to improving their mental health. The evidence is clear that social media is contributing to poor mental health among children and young people. They have a responsibility to help solve this problem that they have played a role in causing. **BHSB urges the House Ways & Means Committee to support HB 1372.**

For more information, please contact BHSB Policy Director Dan Rabbitt at 443-401-6142

References:

¹ Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). “Maryland Youth Risk Behavior Survey 2021-2022.” Available at <https://health.maryland.gov/phpa/ccdpc/Reports/Pages/State-Level-Data,-2021-2022.aspx>.

² Social Media and Youth Mental Health: The U.S. Surgeon General’s Advisory. Available at <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/sg-youth-mental-health-social-media-advisory.pdf>.