



January 29, 2024

The Honorable Vanessa E. Atterbeary
House Ways & Means Committee
House Office Building - Room 131
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Oppose – HB 206: Education - Student Behavior - Parent and Guardian Notice and Required Counseling (Parent and Guardian Accountability Act)

Dear Chairman Atterbeary and Honorable Members of the Committee:

The Maryland Psychiatric Society (MPS) and the Washington Psychiatric Society (WPS) are state medical organizations whose physician members specialize in diagnosing, treating, and preventing mental illnesses, including substance use disorders. Formed more than sixty-five years ago to support the needs of psychiatrists and their patients, both organizations work to ensure available, accessible, and comprehensive quality mental health resources for all Maryland citizens; and strive through public education to dispel the stigma and discrimination of those suffering from a mental illness. As the district branches of the American Psychiatric Association covering the state of Maryland, MPS and WPS represent over 1000 psychiatrists and physicians currently in psychiatric training.

MPS/WPS oppose House Bill 206: Education - Student Behavior - Parent and Guardian Notice and Required Counseling (Parent and Guardian Accountability Act) (HB 206). Our members who work with children and unemancipated adolescents are often frustrated with parents/guardians who fail to seek counseling services for their children. HB 206, however, continues to be a step too far. HB 206 ignores the reality that schools and parents/guardians do not always have harmonious relationships, which, in all honesty, is not always the parents' fault. In turn, some schools may use the vague definition of "disruptiveness" against parents/guardians with whom they are in conflict. Furthermore, accessing mental health, substance use disorder, and/or other behavioral health services is not always easy due to the many other psychosocial stressors that can take priority at any moment for some families. We should not ignore the reality that most of these parents/guardians likely have mental health issues that they are also dealing with. Thus, criminalizing a parent's/guardian's failure to seek treatment for their child is an incorrect solution to the problems the bill aims to remedy.

Even when such care is realized, patients tend to miss a lot of school, which in turn, deters both patients and parents/guardians from seeking the required mental health care. Perhaps HB 206 should prioritize more school resources that minimize the disruptions to a patient's experience with learning, encourage the parents/guardians to participate, and reduce school absences instead of criminalizing parents/guardians, which could lead to unintended consequences such as job loss, other psychosocial concerns, and even loss of custody of the student and other



siblings to the Child Protective Services, which is completely overwhelmed already and unable to find appropriate placement for these kids.

For all the reasons stated above, MPS/WPS ask this committee for an unfavorable report on HB 206. If you have any questions regarding this testimony, please feel free to contact Thomas Tompsett Jr. at tommy.tompsett@mdlobbyist.com.

Respectfully submitted,
The Maryland Psychiatric Society and the Washington Psychiatric Society Legislative Action Committee

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