

**Written Testimony Submitted for the Record to the Maryland House of Delegates
Public Schools - Student Telehealth Appointments - Policy and Access (HB 522)
Ways and Means - For the Hearing on February 7, 2024
SUPPORT**

Free State PTA represents over 70,000 volunteer members and families in over 500 public schools. Free State PTA is composed of families, students, teachers, administrators, and business as well as community leaders devoted to the educational success of children and family engagement in Maryland. As the state's premier and largest child advocacy organization, Free State PTA is a powerful voice for all children, a relevant resource for families, schools and communities and a strong advocate for public education. ***House Bill 522 aligns with the Free State PTA's principle for legislative action that schools must provide a safe environment where all students, teachers and staff can thrive. Our legislative agenda also states that school systems should employ mental health support for school communities.***

House Bill 522 requires each county board of education to establish a policy to accommodate students who need to participate in telehealth appointments during the school day and requires that each public middle and high school designate an appropriate space to conduct those appointments.

The Free State PTA supports this bill in order to expand student access to health professionals. Working families find it difficult to get children to regular health appointments, especially weekly therapy appointments. Even if they are offered telehealth appointments, parents need to take off work, retrieve their child from inside the school, and then sometimes attend a session in their car or another available space if there is no car or remote technology available. This creates a hardship on families or missed appointments for children. These supports are part of an equitable education, because those with less resources are disproportionately affected. Adding this option will also mean less time missed from the classroom if we can eliminate the sign in and sign out process for health related appointments.

Also, Free State supports any effort to expand access to mental health services, and telehealth is one tool to achieve this. We prioritized mental health support in our legislative agenda because we are in a youth mental health crisis. The Covid-19 closures¹ and the readjustment to in person schools has added to student and family stress. We have seen increased drug overdosing² and suicide³, especially in marginalized groups and girls. We need to increase access to health services for Maryland students in an equitable way, and telehealth appointments in schools will help us achieve this goal.

Therefore, Free State PTA urges a favorable vote in support of House Bill 522.

Submitted on behalf of
Gerrod Tyler, President
GTyler@FSTPA.org

¹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8657359/>

² <https://www.uclahealth.org/news/adolescent-drug-overdose-deaths-rose-exponentially-first>

³ <https://jedfoundation.org/mental-health-and-suicide-statistics/>