

Cynthia Scruggs  
1917 Carrollton Road  
Annapolis, MD 21409

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

My testimony is in support of HB 558, a bill to mandate statewide compliance with the Maryland State Department of Education and Maryland Department of Health Comprehensive Health Education Framework.

Our family's experience with mental illness began when our youngest daughter was diagnosed with bipolar disorder. There were signs while she was attending high school in Howard County that she was having difficulties; however, she was a high-performing student who participated in a wide-range of activities. Once she went to college, she suffered more severe symptoms, which eventually led to her diagnosis. Because the actual symptoms of bipolar disorder in a young person do not always match *perceived* common knowledge, the diagnosis was a long time coming. It is an understatement to say that it would have been helpful to our daughter's coping ability had she recognized her symptoms earlier.

Therefore, I enthusiastically endorse meaningful mental health education as an essential part of every Maryland student's curriculum. By learning about mental health disorders early and often, the more likely students are to recognize symptoms and ask for help. Additionally, discussion with teachers and peers is important to help reduce stigmatization so that students will seek help. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, an estimated 49.5 percent of adolescents has had a mental health disorder at some point in their lives.<sup>1</sup> I believe that we owe it to our youth, especially post-pandemic, to hold all county school systems to the standard set forth in a comprehensive health education framework.

Studies show that early intervention and treatment can help lessen the impact on the lives of young people with a mental illness. This bill serves to help empower Maryland's young people with essential health education as a means toward this end.

Respectfully,



<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institute of Mental Health. (2021). *Mental illness*. <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/mental-illness.shtml>