



Testimony in Support of HB612 Lifesavers School Program

Dear Ways and Means Committee,

My name is Catherine Carter, and I am a Vision Advocate, consumer member of the Maryland Board of Examiners of Optometry, and VP of Issues for the PTA of Howard County Board (PTACHC). I have worked for 10+ years to improve the health of our community and schools through active involvement in passing state and national legislation and policy. Today, I speak in my personal capacity as an advocate and behalf of the PTACHC, which represents over 10k PTA, who are asking their elected officials to pass HB612, the Lifesavers School Program, to improve the safety and well-being of our students, staff, and community through first aid and mental wellness training.

The Lifesavers Program aims to recognize schools that prioritize the mental wellness of their students and staff by implementing mental health and peer mentoring programs and providing CPR/First Aid training. Schools participating in the program will undergo renewal every four years. By equipping our students and staff with the skills to support and save each other, we can foster safer schools and communities.

I believe many of us present here have encountered the challenges of supporting loved ones dealing with depression and suicidal thoughts. Personally, I experienced a traumatic incident in high school when I had to rush someone I care about to the hospital after a suicide attempt. This heartbreaking experience left me feeling powerless, questioning if there was more I could have done, and burdened with self-blame. Today, our schools and communities grapple with a mental health crisis, and teachers and students are calling for resources to address the pressing need to prevent suicides. HB612 offers schools the resources, motivation, and recognition to implement Mental Health Wellness and peer mentorship programs that the MSDE has complied but schools across the state have underutilized.

Furthermore, the Lifesavers Bill acknowledges schools that provide crucial first aid training to students and staff, empowering them with the skills needed in emergency situations. My daughter had two emergency incidents at her middle school, highlighting the urgency of such training. In these instances, students were scared and unsure how to help their peers until someone certified in first aid arrived. It took six minutes before proper assistance was provided, demonstrating the critical need for broader first aid education.

After these incidents, I discovered that my teenagers lacked essential First Aid knowledge beyond basic CPR, as their health class was limited by curriculum constraints. Investigating options, I found that the Red Cross offers a First Aid Program allowing teachers and administrators to receive training and, in turn, can train their students. Participation in the Lifesavers First Aid Program can apply towards staff professional development and student community service hours. MSDE also has a list of many of these programs, but schools need an incentive to structure to fully utilize these programs.

Many students will inevitably face emergency situations, such as parties with friends experiencing alcohol or drug-related issues, or peers struggling with mental health challenges. Students are often the first on the scene, and the Lifesaver Program recognizes them as an untapped resource that, with proper skills, can assist and save lives.

In conclusion, I implore the Education Subcommittee to support HB612 and the Lifesavers School Program. By doing so, we can empower our schools and communities to proactively address mental health challenges and equip our students with life-saving skills, creating a safer and more resilient environment for our communities. Thank you for your attention and consideration.

American Red Cross First Aid/CPR/AED

Table of Contents

PART 1 FIRST AID BASICS / 1

CHAPTER 1 Before Giving Care, 2

Preparing for Emergencies	3
Understanding Your Role in the EMS System	5
Obtaining Consent to Help	10
Lowering the Risk for Infection	11
Taking Action: The Emergency Action Steps	16

Skill Sheet	
1-1: Removing Latex-Free Disposable Gloves	22

CHAPTER 2	
Checking an Injured or Ill Person, 23	
Checking a Responsive Person	24
Checking a Person Who Appears to Be Unresponsive	28

Skill Sheets	
2-1: Checking a Responsive Person	30
2-2: Checking a Person Who Appears to Be Unresponsive	32



PART 2 FIRST AID FOR CARDIAC EMERGENCIES AND CHOKING / 34

CHAPTER 3 Cardiac Emergencies, 35

Heart Attack	36
Cardiac Arrest	38
Giving CPR	43
Using an AED	48
Working as a Team	51

Skill Sheets	
3-1: Giving CPR to an Adult	53
3-2: Giving CPR to a Child	55
3-3: Giving CPR to an Infant	57
3-4: Using an AED	59



CHAPTER 4 Choking, 61

Risk Factors for Choking	62
Signs and Symptoms of Choking	63
First Aid for Choking	63

Skill Sheets	
4-1: Caring for an Adult Who Is Choking	68
4-2: Caring for a Child Who Is Choking	70
4-3: Caring for an Infant Who Is Choking	72

PART 3 FIRST AID FOR COMMON ILLNESSES AND INJURIES / 74

CHAPTER 5 Sudden Illness, 75

General Approach to Sudden Illness	76
Respiratory Distress	77
Asthma	78
Allergic Reactions and Anaphylaxis	80
Diabetic Emergencies	83
Seizures	85
Fainting	86
Stroke	87

Skill Sheets	
5-1: Assisting with an Asthma Inhaler	89
5-2: Assisting with an Epinephrine Auto Injector	91



CHAPTER 6 Traumatic Injuries, 93

Shock	94
Internal Bleeding	95
Wounds	95
Burns	103
Muscle, Bone and Joint Injuries	106
Head, Neck and Spinal Injuries	109
Nose and Mouth Injuries	112
Chest Injuries	113
Abdominal Injuries	114
Pelvic Injuries	115

Skill Sheets	
6-1: Using Direct Pressure to Control External Bleeding	116
6-2: Using a Commercial Tourniquet	117

CHAPTER 7	
Environmental Injuries and Illnesses, 118	
Exposure Injuries and Illnesses	119
Poisoning	124
Bites and Stings	128
Rash-Causing Plants	136
Lightning-Strike Injuries	139



APPENDICES

APPENDIX A Emergency Moves, 141

APPENDIX B	
Special First Aid Situations, 144	
Abuse	144
Emergency Childbirth	145

APPENDIX C	
Special Considerations for Signs and Symptoms in Children, 146	
Fever	146
Vomiting and Diarrhea	147
Respiratory Distress	148

APPENDIX D	
Injury Prevention, 149	
General Strategies for Reducing the Risk for Injury	149
Vehicle Safety	150
Fire Safety	151
Safety at Home	152
Safety at Work	154
Safety at Play	155

Glossary, 157

Sources, 161

Photography Credits, 162

Index, 164

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Table of Contents | iv | First Aid/CPR/AED Participant's Manual

13A.04.18.01

.01 Comprehensive Health Education Instructional Programs for Grades Prekindergarten—12.

(3) Safety and Violence Prevention.

(a) High school students shall complete instruction in cardiopulmonary resuscitation that includes hands-only cardiopulmonary resuscitation and the use of an automated external defibrillator.