



Empowering People to Lead Systemic Change

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DisabilityRightsMD.org

HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

TESTIMONY OF DISABILITY RIGHTS MARYLAND

HOUSE BILL 414 – Health and Taxation – Digital Social Media Services and the Mental Health Care Fund for Children and Youth

January 30, 2025

POSITION: SUPPORT

Disability Rights Maryland (DRM) is Maryland's designated Protection and Advocacy agency and is federally mandated to advance the civil rights of people with disabilities. DRM advocates for systemic reforms and policies that improve services and supports for youth with disabilities and works to ensure that their rights are protected. We hear regularly from families who have difficulty accessing mental health services for their children, and DRM advocates for children with disabilities to receive these services in school and in the community. **HB 414 recognizes and provides a unique and innovative step towards the urgent need for increased funding for mental health services in Maryland.**

The prevalence of mental health conditions in children and youth has increased rapidly over the past decade.¹ In 2022, 69 percent of public school administrators reported more students were seeking school-based mental health services since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.² Not only does HB 414 respond to an urgent need in our state, the bill's method for funding these services is particularly appropriate. While the dramatic increase in youth mental health conditions can be attributed to several factors, many experts suggest social media use plays a major role. In 2023, the former U.S. Surgeon General's Office released an advisory that described the "profound risk of harm" that social media has on youth mental health.³ The advisory describes the correlation between social media use and mental health struggles, and that youth experiencing poor mental health are at an even higher risk of harm.⁴

¹ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Servs. Admin.(SAMHSA), Behavioral Health Resources for Youth, <https://www.samhsa.gov/mental-health/children-and-families/school-health/resources> (Apr. 17, 2024).

² Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics. *Mental Health and Well-Being of Students and Staff During the Pandemic*, https://ies.ed.gov/schoolsurvey/spp/SPP_April_Infographic_Mental_Health_and_Well_Being.pdf (Apr. 22 2022).

³ Office of the Surgeon General (OSG). *Social Media and Youth Mental Health: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory*. US Department of Health and Human Services (2023).

⁴ Id. at 7.

DRM strongly believes that increased funding for youth mental health services is necessary to address the dramatic need for such services and will contribute to a healthier and safer environment for all children and youth in our state. By directing a portion of the substantial revenue that social media services in this state receive towards youth mental health services, Maryland would also ensure that those who benefit from the prevalence of social media use in youth are also contributing to strategies to combat the negative effects that social media may have.

For the foregoing reasons, DRM supports HB 414.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this information to you today. For more information, please contact Payton Aldridge, Esq. at 443-692-2495 or PaytonA@disabilityrightsmd.org.