

Good Morning Senators.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today on this very important bill that will help combat the mental health crisis that we are living with in our schools and communities. My name is Tara Segree and I am an author, educator, speaker, and consultant from Annapolis, Maryland. As a teacher for over 20 years, I have witnessed firsthand the decline in the mental health of my colleagues and the rise of burnout due to the demands on the teaching profession. Teaching is one of the greatest professions there is, as we change lives daily and have the opportunity to see the good in all students, and to help them build upon their strengths so that they can have confidence in who they are, collaborate with others, and create solutions to problems. Teachers can turn a child's life of hardships into one that blooms to change the world for the better. We know too that the opposite is true and a child can lose all confidence in themselves if they do not have a rapport built with their teacher. But to build that rapport, teachers need to be optimistic, open, genuine, looking for the good in all students, have wellbeing and be flourishing in their own lives, so they can take on the heavy work of teaching and guiding the next generations.

I absolutely loved my teaching experience. It brought me great joy as I loved my students and colleagues and found value in the daily challenges. But I am not your typical teacher as teaching mindfulness to my students and fellow staff members is something I have done my entire teaching career.

My first teaching job was back in 1997 in Pinellas County Public Schools in Florida, where teaching seemed to be a little less stressful. Times change though and now we have the scrutiny of test scores, multiple Student Learning Objectives, weekly planning meetings, Professional Developments, parent conferences, communicating and logging parent emails and

phone calls, progress reports, report cards, grading, data tracking, lesson plans, observations, classroom visits, IEP meetings, 504 meetings, committee meetings, modifications of lessons to reach all students, department meetings, learning new technology every year, using the new technology and platforms that seemed to change every year for documenting lessons and assignments, and oh yeah... the actual art of teaching, delivering curriculum in a fun and exciting way that makes students want to engage in the lesson. Don't worry, your only competitor is TikTok. And to do all that, don't forget you must build rapport with students because that is the only way they are going to want to engage with you. And we wonder why our teachers are stressed out?

A lot has changed since 1997, and it has changed for the better, but we need to make sure that our teachers are supported mentally and that they are better than fine, because what I have noticed is that they are not.

I was blessed to be at one of the greatest high schools in our state, here in Anne Arundel County, for the last 7 years. The high school was very open to me doing professional developments around wellness and flourishing for our school staff, as well as having a mindfulness room during the open blocks for students, and starting the Student Alliance for Flourishing back in 2020 that is now in at least 7 different schools in AACPS, and other schools across the world. I was able to run multiple meditation sessions for our teachers and staff yearly starting in 2020, as well as run multiple professional developments on bringing mindfulness into their life and their classroom. My professional developments and meditation workshops were very well received and attended by administration, teachers, and support staff.

I separated from the county last July 2025 to do my education consulting in mindfulness full-time, only because it became a conflict of interest. I saw there was a great need to assist

educators with mental wellness. Bringing wellness and flourishing into educators' lives helps them to respond to challenges instead of reacting. The teachers I worked with were lovely and some of my best friends, but they were burnt out and stressed out due to the demands of our profession. The responsibilities continue to pile on more and more each year, and accountability is scrutinized, which is necessary, but we need to make sure our teachers can mentally handle the pressure of the profession.

I have been a part of the School University Partnership for the past 8 years, as a mentor for student teachers from Notre Dame of Maryland University, and as adjunct faculty for NDMU, teaching those student teachers. I have had the privilege of seeing the school university partnership from both sides, as a mentor, as an instructor, and now as a supervisor of international students here to get their master's in special education. That has been a gift as I know what is happening in the classroom, as well as what these student teachers need to understand to be successful in the classroom, including taking care of their mental health.

Teachers need access to tools that will help them regulate emotions and be able to respond to challenges with grace. If SB726 is written into law, teachers would then have access to professional developments that give them these tools, and allow them to be supported, to navigate this world flourishing, and feel valued by their school system.

You have the opportunity to make a big impact on education, by focusing on the adults in the school building, by allowing our educators the power of wellbeing and flourishing, and that wellbeing and flourishing will only trickle down to our students and our communities.

Teachers have to attend multiple PDs a year. Why not include one that benefits all educators and has the ability to help our world evolve into a more peaceful and harmonious planet? The ripple effect will be life changing as teachers, students, and communities will start to reflect the energy

of peace that ripples out from the adults in the schools, to students, to families, to our communities. And isn't that what our world needs right now? A little more peace?

Please vote to make SB726 law to ensure that all teachers have access to mental wellness and flourishing tools that they can then use with their students to make this world a better place.

Thank you for your time and dedication to our state, ensuring equity for all, especially our teachers who mold our future generations.