

February 24, 2026

Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Hayes, and distinguished members of the Finance Committee,

NAMI Maryland and our 11 local affiliates across the state represent a network of more than 60,000 families, individuals, community-based organizations, and service providers. NAMI Maryland is a 501(c)(3) non-profit dedicated to providing education, support, and advocacy for people living with mental illnesses, their families, and the wider community.

NAMI Maryland believes that no individual should be subject to practices that worsen mental health symptoms, and this bill represents a critical step in creating evidence-based public policies to protect the well-being of Maryland's youth.

We are currently facing an unprecedented youth mental health crisis. Between 2011 and 2021, the percentage of high school students reporting persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness increased by 50 percent. This trend coincides with a near-universal rise in social media use, with U.S. teens now spending an average of nearly five hours daily on these platforms. While social media can provide vital community for marginalized groups, such as LGBTQ youth, it also poses documented risks, including depression, social comparison, cyberbullying, sleep disruption, and body image concerns. As the U.S. Surgeon General has noted, there is not yet enough evidence to determine if these platforms are sufficiently safe for children.

SB602 would utilize civil penalties and settlement revenues from claims concerning harm to children from social media to fund critical mental health initiatives. The fund will provide for research into algorithmic addiction treatment and the specific impact of social media on youth mental health. The risks posed by improper use of algorithms and social media are well-documented by major medical associations, including the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Psychiatric Association. Maryland has the opportunity to lead by ensuring that the damages recovered from harmful practices are reinvested into the health and safety of our children

For these reasons, we urge a favorable report.

Stephanie Slowly-Little
Executive Director
National Alliance on Mental Illness, Maryland

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