

**Unfavorable Statement HB740**

Public Schools – School-Based Mental Health Services – Full-Time Therapist  
Deborah Brocato, Retired Registered Nurse

**As a retired registered nurse and mother of 4, I strongly oppose HB740.**

In Maryland and many other states, we are seeing blatant disregard for parental rights. This bill is another way to put a wedge between parents and their children. Schools were put in place to provide a proper academic education. They were never meant to be a place for one-stop shopping to address every concern for a child. A full-time therapist in the schools would mean immediate access for a child without input from the parents. The Mental Health Access Initiative allows children as young as 12 to seek mental health care without parental consent. Putting a full-time counselor in the schools makes bypassing the parents just too easy.

Parents are the first counselors for children. If parents feel their children need more than they can provide, it would be the parents' decision to seek that assistance. This is, of course, for the majority of cases which do not involve some kind of abuse. For abuse cases, there are already processes in place to make sure the child gets the help they need. Maryland has mandatory reporting and children can be removed from the home by due process in a court of law.

When a parent seeks some type of mental health therapy, they search for the appropriate person to address the individual needs of their child. With a therapist already in the school, the inexperienced and uninformed child who thinks they want to see someone is forced to see this one person. With the therapist already on staff, it is likely there would be class instruction time allotted to this person to describe what they do. This time would easily be used to influence students on a need for the therapist. And again, all of this access and information would not be known to the parents. The parent-child relationship needs to be encouraged and supported for the well-being of the child. Studies show that best outcomes for a child occur when there is parental involvement and schools cooperate with the parents.

Parents know their children best. They have been with them from the beginning providing the physical, emotional and psychological needs of their child. Parents are the authority for their children and must be the ones to make the educational and healthcare decisions. Random adults lack the insight of the parents and should be prevented from inserting themselves in a child's life and guiding them with a personal agenda that may not be in the child's best interest.

I urge you to recognize parental rights. Please protect and defend parents' authority to make educational and healthcare decisions for their children. **I strongly recommend an unfavorable report for HB740.**