

February 18, 2026

Chair Wilkins, Vice Chair Feldmark, and distinguished members of the Ways and Means 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 public policies and practices should promote greater awareness and early identification of mental health conditions. NAMI Maryland supports public policies and laws that enable all schools, public and private, to increase access to appropriate mental health services.

One in six U.S. youth aged 6-17 experience a mental health disorder each year, and half of all mental health conditions begin by age 14. Undiagnosed, untreated or inadequately treated mental illnesses can significantly interfere with a student's ability to learn, grow and develop. Since children spend much of their productive time in educational settings, schools offer a unique opportunity for early identification, prevention, and interventions that serve students where they already are.

By removing barriers such as transportation, scheduling conflicts and stigma, school-based mental health services can help students access needed services during the school-day. Children and youth with more serious mental health needs may require school-linked mental health services that connect youth and families to more intensive resources in the community.

Early identification and effective treatment for children and their families can make a difference in the lives of children with mental health conditions. We must take steps that enable all schools to increase access to appropriate mental health services.

By requiring schools to employ a full-time therapist, we are ensuring we meet our children where they are. Children with mental health conditions already face barriers in accessing care—leaving many people without options for mental health in their community. This bill ensures that there is an opportunity for early intervention.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable report.

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

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