



Mission: To improve public health in Maryland through education and advocacy ***Vision:*** Healthy Marylanders living in Healthy Communities

WRITTEN TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 468
Health and Taxation - Digital Social Media Services and the Mental Health Care Fund
for Children and Youth
Committee: Ways and Means
By: Maryland Public Health Association (MdPHA)
Hearing Date: February 12, 2026

Chair Jheanelle Wilkins, Vice-Chair Jessica Feldmark, and members of the House Ways and Means Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify in favor of HB 468, which creates a fund to improve access to mental health services for children and youth, financed by a tax on certain digital social media revenues, with provisions for tax collection and revenue distribution.

The widespread and escalating rates of mental health disorders among children and adolescents in the United States demand immediate action.¹ Findings from earlier monitoring efforts and research suggest that about one in five children and adolescents experience a mental health disorder in any given year, nearly two in five will meet diagnostic criteria for a mental disorder by the age of 18, and roughly half of all mental health disorders begin before age 14.^{2, 3, 4, 5} Also, the rates of anxiety, depression, and other mental health challenges among children and adolescents have risen significantly, while access to timely and affordable care remains limited for many families.⁶

Mental health concerns continue to affect a large share of Maryland's youth, with roughly 34% to 36% of middle and high school students reporting feelings of sadness or hopelessness during the 2022–2023 period.⁷

¹ Shim R, Szilagyi M, Perrin JM. Epidemic Rates of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Disorders Require an Urgent Response. *Pediatrics*. 2022;149(5):e2022056611

² National Research Council and Institute of Medicine Committee. Preventing mental, emotional, and behavioral disorders among young people: progress and possibilities. Washington, DC: National Academies Press; 2009.

³ Angold A, Erkanli A, Farmer EM, et al. Psychiatric disorder, impairment, and service use in rural African American and white youth. *Arch Gen Psychiatry* 2002;59:893–901. <https://doi.org/10.1001/archpsyc.59.10.893> PMID:12365876

⁴ Merikangas KR, He JP, Burstein M, et al. Lifetime prevalence of mental disorders in U.S. adolescents: results from the National Comorbidity Survey Replication—Adolescent Supplement (NCS-A). *J Am Acad Child Adolesc Psychiatry* 2010;49:980–9. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaac.2010.05.017> PMID:20855043

⁵ Jaffee SR, Harrington H, Cohen P, Moffitt TE. Cumulative prevalence of psychiatric disorder in youths. *J Am Acad Child Adolesc Psychiatry* 2005;44:406–7. <https://doi.org/10.1097/01.chi.0000155317.38265.61> PMID:15843760

⁶ Xu L, Lu W, Talwar D, Maness SB, Luo H. Changes in mental health problems and access to mental health care among US adolescents before and during the COVID-19 pandemic: results from the national survey of children's health. *BMC Public Health*. 2025 Jul 3;25(1):2343. doi: 10.1186/s12889-025-23396-7. PMID: 40610921; PMCID: PMC12224661.

⁷ *Pages—Maryland department of health releases 2022-2023 youth risk behavior survey and youth tobacco*

Several legislative initiatives in the United States have been introduced to create funds for improving youth mental health services, financed by taxes on digital social media revenues.⁸ For example, Washington (HB 2038 / SB 5799) introduced in 2025⁹ and Chicago, Illinois (SMART Act) unveiled in 2025.¹⁰

We strongly support this legislation as it addresses a growing and urgent public health need. By creating a dedicated funding mechanism, this bill takes a proactive step toward ensuring that children and youth can receive early intervention and ongoing mental health services that are critical to their well-being and long-term development.

The bill's funding approach is both responsible and equitable, generating revenue through a tax on certain digital social media services that contribute to the online environments shaping young people's mental health. Social media platforms benefit substantially from youth engagement¹¹, and this measure appropriately reinvests a portion of that revenue into mitigating associated mental health harms. This structure allows the State to expand mental health services without placing additional financial strain on families already facing barriers to care.

Finally, the bill's clear provisions for tax calculation, collection, and revenue distribution promote transparency, accountability, and effective use of funds. Directing the Comptroller to allocate revenues specifically toward children's and youth mental health services ensures that resources reach their intended purpose.

For these reasons, the Maryland Public Health Association urges favorable consideration of House Bill 468 as a meaningful investment in the health, resilience, and future of our State's children and youth.

Thank you.

The Maryland Public Health Association (MdPHA) is a nonprofit, statewide organization of public health professionals dedicated to improving the lives of all Marylanders through education, advocacy, and collaboration. We support public policies consistent with our vision of healthy Marylanders living in healthy, equitable, communities. MdPHA is the state affiliate of the American Public Health Association, a nearly 145-year-old professional organization dedicated to improving population health and reducing the health disparities that plague our state and our nation.

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survey data. (n.d.). Maryland.Gov Enterprise Agency Template. Retrieved February 10, 2026, from <https://health.maryland.gov/newsroom/Pages/default.aspx>

⁸ *Lawmakers weigh taxing social media – Pluribus News.* (n.d.). Retrieved February 10, 2026, from <https://pluribusnews.com/news-and-events/lawmakers-weigh-taxing-social-media/>

⁹ Wilson, R. (2025, April 8). *Washington state considers taxing social media to fund mental health programs.* Becker's Behavioral Health. <https://www.beckersbehavioralhealth.com/behavioral-health-government-policies/washington-state-considers-taxing-social-media-to-fund-mental-health-programs/>

¹⁰ Desk, N. (2025, October 16). *Chicago slaps social media giants with new \$31m 'mental health' tax.* Southwest Regional Publishing. <https://southwestregionalpublishing.com/2025/10/16/chicago-slaps-social-media-giants-with-new-31m-mental-health-tax/>

¹¹ Raffoul, A., Ward, Z. J., Santoso, M., Kavanaugh, J. R., & Austin, S. B. (2023). Social media platforms generate billions of dollars in revenue from U.S. youth: Findings from a simulated revenue model. *PLOS ONE*, 18(12), e0295337. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0295337>