

Dr. Kristine E. Larson: Oral and Written Testimony

HB0800: *Maryland Student Well-Being and Flourishing Act*

Wednesday February 18, 2026

Chair Wilkins and Members of the Ways and Means Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Dr. Kristine Larson. I am currently an Assistant Professor of Special Education at Loyola University Maryland, however today I am speaking to you from the perspective of an applied researcher in human flourishing with practical experience implementing these principles in Anne Arundel County Public Schools.

As Maryland continues fulfilling the Blueprint, we have a unique opportunity to strengthen our commitment to whole-child education. Central to this vision is integrating student well-being and flourishing—not as an additional mandate or competing priority, but as a natural extension of our work in behavioral health.

From 2020-2024, I led the Student Alliance for Flourishing (SAFF) initiative in Anne Arundel County Public Schools. During this project, we found that flourishing and well-being can be embedded within a multi-tiered system of support, starting with Tier 1 schoolwide and proactive practices and building to targeted small-group (tier 2) and individualized supports (tier 3). Findings across multiple schools showed that when students participate in extracurricular programming focused on flourishing, they experienced improved overall well-being, reduced stress, deeper relationships, and decreased feelings of loneliness—all of which are foundational aspects of closing achievement gaps so that all students can succeed. By explicitly naming flourishing and well-being within the Blueprint, Maryland signals a commitment to proactive care, support, and holistic child development which will ultimately impact students' success.

In closing, integrating student well-being and flourishing into the Blueprint is not about adding more to teacher or administrators' plates. It is about aligning and integrating what we know works so that every Maryland student can live happy, healthy, and productive lives while they are in school and after they graduate.

Thank you so much for your time today.