

MEMORANDUM

TO: Chairwoman Jheanelle Wilkins
and Members of the Ways & Means Committee

Chairwoman Heather Bagnall
and Members of the Health Committee

FROM: Tammy Stinnett, Constituent

DATE: February 16, 2026

**RE: Public Schools – School-Based Mental Health Services – Full-Time
Therapist Position: FAVORABLE**

My name is **Tammy Stinnett**, and as a constituent, I am writing in strong support of **House Bill 740 – Public Schools – School-Based Mental Health Services – Full-Time Therapist**.

On January 6, 2024, our beautiful and talented cousin, **Kayla R. Johnson**, died by suicide. Kayla was smart, bright, and always smiling. She cared deeply about people and about education, and she made friends everywhere she went. She was kind, compassionate, and always willing to help others.

What we did not fully understand at the time was that, like many other young people, Kayla had struggled with her mental health for years.

Mental health challenges often begin long before a crisis occurs. Adolescence is a critical period when depression, anxiety, trauma, and feelings of isolation frequently first emerge. While Kayla was an adult when she passed away, the support she may have needed most was during her teenage years — when early intervention, consistent therapy, and accessible care could have helped her build coping skills and resilience.

For many families, accessing mental health care is incredibly difficult due to cost, transportation barriers, long waitlists, and stigma surrounding mental health treatment — particularly within Black households. Placing licensed therapists directly in schools brings support to where children and adolescents spend most of their day. In schools, teachers and staff can notice changes in behavior, peers can offer encouragement, and early warning signs can be addressed before they escalate into crisis.

School-based mental health professionals do more than respond to emergencies. They teach coping skills, problem-solving strategies, emotional regulation, and resilience. They build trusted relationships that reduce isolation and create a safe space for students to be heard.

Early mental health treatment for children and families produces meaningful outcomes and long-term cost savings. Evidence-based treatment is associated with:

- Fewer behavioral problems and reduced symptoms of PTSD, depression, and anxiety in children
- Lower parental stress, anxiety, and depression
- Prevention of child abuse and neglect
- Improved long-term educational success, physical and mental health, and financial stability.¹

While we cannot change what happened to Kayla, we can honor her memory by ensuring other children have better access to the care they need. Supporting HB 740 is a meaningful and necessary step toward protecting students' mental health and safety across Maryland.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to support **House Bill 740**.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Tammy Stinnett
Tammy Stinnett

¹ See. Montgomery County Youth Behavioral Health Part 1: Background, https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/OLO/Resources/Files/2025_reports/OLOREport2025-9.pdf, Montgomery County Office of Legislative Oversight, pg. 3, (June 17, 2025)