



February 18, 2026

**House Ways & Means Committee
LETTER OF INFORMATION**

HB 740 – Public Schools - School-Based Mental Health Services - Full-Time Therapist

Behavioral Health System Baltimore (BHSB) is a nonprofit organization that serves as the local behavioral health authority (LBHA) for Baltimore City. BHSB works to increase access to a full range of quality behavioral health (mental health and substance use) services and advocates for innovative approaches to prevention, early intervention, treatment and recovery for individuals, families, and communities. Baltimore City represents nearly 35 percent of the public behavioral health system in Maryland, serving over 100,000 people with mental illness and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as “behavioral health”) annually.

Behavioral Health System Baltimore would like to provide a letter of information regarding HB 740 – Public Schools - School-Based Mental Health Services - Full-Time Therapist. This bill would require every public school to employ a full-time therapist licensed by the Board of Professional Counselors and Therapists. BHSB shares the intent of this bill to increase access to mental health services for children and youth but would recommend considering the full range of options available to increase mental health access.

Maryland school-aged children are facing a severe mental health crisis. Over one third of Maryland high school students report persistent feelings of sadness and hopelessness and almost 10% attempt suicide in a given year. Baltimore City high school students are struggling even more with over 40% reporting persistent sadness and 13.7% attempting suicide.¹ It is clear more must be done to support our state’s children.

Schools represent a key opportunity to provide mental health services. There are currently hundreds of different programs and partnerships including direct school employment of counselors and therapists, partnerships with community-based behavioral health organizations, and innovative programming provided through the Consortium on Coordinated Community Supports. The Consortium was established through the Blueprint and is now providing services to 167,000 students in 80% of all Maryland schools, including 36,000 students in Baltimore City.²³ These programs are showing strong results but have faced budget cuts for the past several years.

Enacting HB 740 would mandate a specific model of licensed counselors employed by the school. This would likely expand access but does not recognize the other initiatives and partnerships currently underway. It could also strain the existing behavioral health workforce. Maryland lacks 32,786 behavioral health professionals including 9,532 counselors and therapists.⁴ Satisfying the requirement under HB 740 would likely mean hiring professionals away from community-based programs to work for the school and that might not increase access in the way intended. Lastly, the bill is prescriptive in requiring professionals licensed by the Board of Professional Counselors, but this ignores many other licensed clinicians such as licensed clinical social workers who routinely provide and bill for mental health therapy.

BHSB urges the committee to consider the full range of options for improving school mental health when considering HB 740.

For more information, please contact BHSB Policy Director Dan Rabbitt at 443-401-6142

Endnotes:

¹ Maryland Department of Health. Youth Risk Behavior Survey 2022-2023. Available at <https://health.maryland.gov/phpa/ccdpc/Reports/Pages/YRBS-2022-2023.aspx>

² Maryland Community Health Resources Commission (CHRC). Consortium of Coordinated Community Supports. Available at <https://health.maryland.gov/mchrc/Pages/Maryland-Consortium-on-Consolidated-Community-Supports.aspx>

³ CHRC. Baltimore City Family Resource Guide. Available at <https://health.maryland.gov/mchrc/Documents/Family%20Resource%20Guides/Baltimore%20City%20Directory%20Acc%20FINAL.pdf>

⁴ Maryland Health Care Commission. Investing in Maryland's Behavioral Health Talent. October 2024. Available at https://mhcc.maryland.gov/mhcc/pages/plr/plr/documents/2024/md_bh_workforce_rpt_SB283.pdf