

**Department of Legislative Services**  
 Maryland General Assembly  
 2021 Session

**FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE**  
**First Reader**

Senate Bill 161 (Senator Eckardt)  
 Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

**Task Force to Study Access to Mental Health Care in Higher Education**

This bill establishes the Task Force to Study Access to Mental Health Care in Higher Education. The Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) must provide staff for the task force. In addition, the Chancellor of the University System of Maryland (USM) must appoint an individual to assist MHEC with staffing. Members of the task force may not receive compensation but are entitled to reimbursement for expenses, as provided in the State budget. The task force must submit an interim report by December 1, 2021, and a final report by December 1, 2022. **The bill takes effect June 1, 2021, and terminates May 31, 2023.**

**Fiscal Summary**

**State Effect:** No effect in FY 2021. General fund expenditures may increase by as much as \$60,500 in FY 2022 and \$25,200 in FY 2023 to staff the task force, as discussed below. Any expense reimbursements for members of the task force are assumed to be minimal and absorbable with existing budgeted resources. Future years reflect the elimination of the contractual position and subsequent termination of the task force. No effect on revenues.

(in dollars)	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024	FY 2025	FY 2026
Revenues	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
GF Expenditure	60,500	25,200	0	0	0
Net Effect	(\$60,500)	(\$25,200)	\$0	\$0	\$0

*Note: ( ) = decrease; GF = general funds; FF = federal funds; SF = special funds; - = indeterminate increase; (-) = indeterminate decrease*

**Local Effect:** None.

**Small Business Effect:** None.

## Analysis

**Bill Summary:** The task force must:

- study the policies and procedures adopted by institutions of higher education in the State regarding access to mental health care and the prevention and treatment of mental illness in students;
- examine the challenges for institutions of higher education in meeting the demand for mental health services;
- review best practices for accessing off-campus mental health services;
- review best practices for, and barriers to, the implementation of counseling services, including crisis, personal, mental health, sexual violence, and substance abuse counseling;
- review and identify the best models for accessing mental health services, including consideration of stand-alone centers, centers with integrated student health services, comprehensive services, case management, and crisis resources;
- identify concerns in rural areas and workforce shortage areas; and
- study any other matters the task force considers appropriate.

Further, the task force must make recommendations regarding:

- ways to reduce costs and barriers to providing access to mental health services on campus;
- the use of telemedicine and video conferencing;
- the use of hotlines and other means to disseminate information to students related to mental health services concerning availability and fees;
- the implementation of general mental health counseling services and specialized counseling services; and
- any other matters the task force considers appropriate.

The bill establishes the membership of the task force. The Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House must jointly designate the chair of the task force.

**State Expenditures:** Although MHEC advises that it may be able to staff the task force with existing resources (given the requirement for USM to appoint an individual to assist with staffing), in its estimate for prior-year legislation, MHEC opined that it would need additional resources to do so and the Department of Legislative Services (DLS) agreed. As the duties of the task force are broad and outside the normal realm of MHEC duties, DLS still believes that MHEC may need contractual support for approximately a year and a half. Accordingly, general fund expenditures for MHEC increase by as much as \$60,545 in

fiscal 2022, which reflects the cost of hiring one full-time contractual employee to staff the task force and assumes a 30-day start-up delay from the bill's June 1, 2021 effective date. The estimate includes a salary, fringe benefits, one-time start-up costs, and ongoing operating expenses.

Contractual Position	1
Salary and Fringe Benefits	\$54,800
One-time Start-up Costs	5,090
Operating Expenses	<u>655</u>
<b>Total FY 2022 State Expenditures</b>	<b>\$60,545</b>

This estimate does not include any health insurance costs that could be incurred for specified contractual employees under the State's implementation of the federal Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.

Future year expenditures reflect elimination of the contractual position on December 31, 2022, after the report is due and subsequent termination of the task force.

Any expense reimbursements for task force members are assumed to be minimal and absorbable within existing budgeted resources. USM can appoint an individual to assist MHEC with staffing using existing resources. Institutions can provide any requested information using existing resources.

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### **Additional Information**

**Prior Introductions:** SB 1015 of 2020 received a hearing in the Senate Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee, but no further action was taken. HB 1504 of 2020 received a hearing in the House Appropriations Committee, but no further action was taken.

**Designated Cross File:** HB 244 (Delegate Valentino-Smith) - Appropriations.

**Information Source(s):** Maryland Higher Education Commission; University System of Maryland; Department of Legislative Services

**Fiscal Note History:** First Reader - January 19, 2021  
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