

Good afternoon

My name is Emma Content, I am a 2019 graduate of SMCM. I have testified twice before on behalf of students as SMCM in regard to mental health access. Unfortunately, despite myself and other students speaking up, the situation at SMCM has not improved.

By this 'situation' I refer to the appalling lack of care that the SMCM administration has for students with mental illness and associated learning disabilities. A brief synopsis of the facilities at SMCM, which the Dean's office has repeatedly claimed as being some of the best in the state includes:

Only 4 counselors. (Counselors, not therapists) for close to 2500 students. One psychiatrist who appears once a week and takes up to 5 weeks to schedule with, no matter how urgent the issue. Not open on weekends. Walk-in hours for two hours a day, during which regular appointments are scheduled with therapists, rendering them essentially unusable. The nearest hospital is 45 minutes away and is proposed by the dean of students as an accessible option, when it should be a last resort for students in only the direst of circumstances.

Despite other students and I consistently pressuring the administration for increased funding and resources for the poorly understaffed and overworked Wellness Center on campus, we have instead been told to 'sit down' and be 'be quiet' about our cause. I have spoken at student roundtables, I have sat in on budget meetings to ask questions, and I have raised my voice at Board of Trustee meetings in regard to this issue. Instead of trying to work with myself and other students, the Dean of students has flat out said that 'student health is not a budget priority.'

While the SMCM administration has refused to take action, I have watched students be denied medication, be prescribed medication out of their health-care plan or beyond their price range, fail classes and have to withdraw, have breakdowns in the lobby of the wellness center due to cancelled appointments resulting from understaffing, and in some cases, try to commit suicide. I watched my own grades slip due to inadequate mental health care options, eventually causing a panic attack that was so bad I hyperventilated, passed out, and received a concussion from cracking my head on a desk on the way down. I still have issues from that concussion to this day.

I try to tell myself I'm not asking for much. After all, the situation at SMCM is better compared to larger campuses like UMD and UMBC, where students have taken their lives related to this same issue. This is a tragic symptom of our larger health-care network being unequipped to deal with mental health care needs. SMCM is merely one example of a much larger issue that needs to be addressed not only for students, but for residents across Maryland.