

ADDIE C. ECKARDT

Legislative District 37

Caroline, Dorchester, Talbot
and Wicomico Counties



Annapolis Office

James Senate Office Building

11 Bladen Street, Room 322

Annapolis, Maryland 21401

410-841-3590 · 301-858-3590

800-492-7122 Ext. 3590

Fax 410-841-3087 · 301-858-3087

Adelaide.Eckardt@senate.state.md.us

Budget and Taxation Committee

Health and Human Services
Subcommittee

Joint Committees

Administrative, Executive,
and Legislative Review

Audit

Children, Youth, and Families

Fair Practices and
State Personnel Oversight

Pensions

THE SENATE OF MARYLAND

ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

District Office

601 Locust Street, Suite 202

Cambridge, MD 21613

410-221-6561

Testimony for Senate Bill 161
Task Force to Study Access to Mental Health Care in Higher Education
January 20, 2021

Chairman Pinsky and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to present Senate Bill 161: Task Force to Study Access to Mental Health Care in Higher Education. This bill is a response to the mental health crisis in our state, specifically among students at institutions of higher education.

A number of factors drive the need to improve access to health care in higher education. An increasing number of students arrive at our universities with histories of mental health issues and the rates of depression among students continue to rise. Once at an institution, societal stressors including substance abuse, social media, and intensified expectations increase the need for mental health support services.

Mental health issues increase the likelihood that an individual will drop out of school and negatively impacts grade point averages. Universities struggle to provide counseling in areas including: crisis counseling, personal counseling, mental health counseling, health and wellness counseling, and substance use and assessment counseling.

Senate Bill 161 will establish a task force to study which models can best improve access to mental health care among institutions of higher education. The task force will study existing policies, examine the challenges that institutions face, review best practices, identify the best models, and identify concerns in rural areas. The task force must also make recommendations on ways to reduce costs, examine the use of telemedicine and hotlines, and study the implementation of general mental health counseling services. The task force will report interim findings by December 1, 2021 and make a final report by December 1, 2022.

The COVID-19 pandemic and challenges to education have highlighted the need for quality mental health support services for our students. Senate Bill 161 will allow the State to make

informed, data-driven decisions to meet this need. Thank you for your consideration and I respectfully ask for a favorable report of Senate Bill 161.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Addie C. Eckardt". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Senator Addie C. Eckardt