



**PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY
BOARD OF EDUCATION**
14201 School Lane, Upper Marlboro, MD
20772

Title: Public Schools - Student Attendance - Excused Absences for Mental Health Needs
Bill Number: **HB 461** Position: **Favorable**
Hearing Date: March 30, 2021
Committee: Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs
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As amended, House Bill 461 requires a local board of education to excuse an absence due to a student's mental health needs as a lawful absence, without the need for a doctor's note. This bill also requires the student to have permission from a parent or guardian, and to meet with a school mental health specialist upon returning to school.

Addressing the mental health needs of students has been the cornerstone of ensuring that they are present and ready to learn during distance learning. It has been identified by many stakeholders, students and parents, as a confounding reason for academic and social disengagement which has rendered many students vulnerable. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated mental health conditions for many students with pre-existing stressors and has created new struggles for students who had otherwise been able to cope. School systems across the nation have now realized that mental health support is critical in supporting the whole child. House Bill 461 will assist the school system in our efforts to support students' mental health needs beyond the current pandemic.

This bill will also allow us to hold students harmless in being able to attend to their mental health needs by using a lawful absence.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on HB 461. Thank you for your consideration.