



**SENATE EDUCATION, HEALTH & ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**  
**Senate Bill 161**  
**Task Force to Study Access to Mental Health Care in Higher Education**  
**January 20, 2021**  
**Letter of Information**

Chair Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to share our thoughts regarding Senate Bill 161. The bill establishes the Task Force to Study Access to Mental Health Care in Higher Education.

Upon the conclusion of the 2019 legislative session, the University System of Maryland (USM), Morgan State University (MSU), and St. Mary's College of Maryland (SMCM) were required to complete a JCR Report on Mental Health Services, which was submitted on October 1, 2019 ([http://dlslibrary.state.md.us/publications/JCR/2019/2019\\_201a.pdf](http://dlslibrary.state.md.us/publications/JCR/2019/2019_201a.pdf)).

Our institutions were able to handle this request with few challenges because for the three years prior, USM, MSU, and St. Mary's vice presidents for student affairs (VPSA), in close partnership with campus health center directors, counseling center directors, and the USM Office of Academic and Student Affairs, embraced the challenges surrounding mental health services in higher education. These in-depth conversations include the sharing of best practices and the evaluation of efforts deemed less successful.

One of the group's most recent organized efforts to study access to mental health care in higher education was the creation of a survey. In Spring 2018, the VPSAs developed the survey, which included questions about: staffing for on-campus centers; the profile of counseling centers and services including accreditations; trends in demand for services; strategies being used/considered to meet escalating demand; counseling center staff to student ratio; scope of services; expenditures; appointment management; outreach and education; best practices; evaluation of mental health services over time; availability of off-campus resources; reasons students seek support; and services to off-campus student populations.

Select results of this survey were shared with the USM Board of Regents in June 2018, when the Board received a presentation on Trends in Campus Mental Health Services. The presentation featured Liz Brown, Senior Consultant at the Education Advisory Board ([www.eab.com](http://www.eab.com)), who offered a national view of how institutions are meeting escalating demand, and Dr. Nancy Young, Vice President for Student Affairs at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, who offered perspective into how campus-based experts are shifting their thinking and practices to best meet the mental health needs of students. Since that time, the vice presidents have continued to address these issues monthly and in more depth at their annual retreats. The hope is that members of the General Assembly remain aware of the significant work that is being done by the institutions of higher education in Maryland.

In January 2020, the USM began regularly convening the counseling center leadership from our constituent institutions. With these (at least) every-other-month meetings, counseling center and mental health professionals talk and collaborate directly with their peers on topics including, but not limited to: campus updates and sharing of best practices; outreach to students; assessment of data; effects of budget constraints; supporting out-of-state students; serving the needs of students as they pertain to changes and adjustments that can be attributed to COVID-19 and civil unrest; unique ways to provide services and address student needs while establishing and maintaining COVID-19 safety protocols; and the disproportionate impact of the pandemic and racial injustice on underrepresented communities. Although Morgan State University and St. Mary's College of Maryland have been part of the VPSA team and conversations about mental health, the Counseling Center team is excited to invite and welcome Morgan State University and St. Mary's College of Maryland representatives to the meetings. Since the first presentation to the Board of Regents in 2018, we've kept our respective regents informed of the work described above through updates. The vice presidents and the regents are looking forward to another formal mental health services update to the Board of Regents before the end of 2021.

USM has and will continue to examine challenges in meeting the demand for mental health services, best practices for off-campus mental health services, best practices for the implementation of services, staffing, regional concerns, best models for providing care, and more. We are willing to provide any of the aforementioned work and updates on the status of our work.

Thank you for allowing the USM to share our thoughts regarding Senate Bill 161.