

**Testimony in Support with Amendments to House Bill 377
Commission on Student Behavioral Health and Mental Health Treatment**

**Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
April 6, 2021
1:30 pm**

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Government Relations**

The Maryland State Education Association is in support, with amendments, of House Bill 377, legislation that would establish the Commission on Student Behavioral Health and Mental Health Treatment in order to study, evaluate, and revise guidelines for student behavioral health and mental health treatment and practices, including school-based health centers (SBHCs).

MSEA represents 75,000 educators and school employees who work in Maryland's public schools, teaching and preparing our 896,837 students for careers and jobs of the future. MSEA also represents 39 local affiliates in every county across the state of Maryland, and our parent affiliate is the 3 million-member National Education Association (NEA).

The immeasurable adverse impacts, either instigated by or further exacerbated by the COVID-19 global pandemic, present educators at all levels with extraordinary challenges. Not only must we diagnose and remediate any academic learning loss experienced by our students during this extended period of quarantine and virtual learning, but we must also address the untold yet growing trauma, mental, and behavioral health-related challenges. As we move toward re-opening schools for in-person instruction and given the ongoing personnel, resource, and support challenges facing our schools and districts, it stands to reason that previously stretched supports will be even more threadbare and hard to come by in the go forward. Currently Maryland does not have a robust mental and behavioral support personnel pipeline sufficient enough to come even remotely close to the professionally-recommended student to staff ratios, let alone the number of staff



required to meet the pandemic-related needs we face. As such, any efforts to strengthen and improve our school-based health centers—particularly in their delivery of mental and behavioral treatment—is critically important as we begin our transition from virtual to in-person learning.

We respectfully ask that two related suggestions be taken into consideration for the purposes of amending this legislation.

1. We ask that a practicing public school teacher—designated by the Maryland State Education Association or the Baltimore Teacher’s Union—be included as a member of the Commission.
2. With the exception of the representative from the State Board of Education, we ask that the commission members denoted on page 2, lines 4-16 be designated by their respective professional associations or statewide advocacy groups rather than the State Superintendent of Schools such that,
 - a. the representative from the Maryland Association of Student Councils be designated by its members;
 - b. the representative from the Public School Superintendents’ Association be designated by its members;
 - c. the representative who is a school administrator be designated by the members of the Maryland Association of Elementary School Principals or the Maryland Association of Secondary School Principals;
 - d. the representative who is employed in a school-based health center be designated by the Maryland Assembly on School-Based Health Care;
 - e. the representative who is employed as a school nurse be designated by the Maryland Association of School Health Nurses; and
 - f. the representative from the Maryland Association of School Psychologists be designated by its members.

We believe these considerations would strengthen the overall goal of ensuring our students have the supports they need in order to adequately respond to our current pandemic-related mental and behavioral health needs.

We ask the committee to issue a Favorable Report, including the above referenced considerations, on House Bill 377.