



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE

Anne Arundel County Branch

“Freedom Fighters for a New Century”

Testimony of the NAACP Anne Arundel County Branch

Jacqueline Boone Allsup, President

Health and Government Operations Committee

HB 132 – Mental Health Access Initiative

February 16, 2021

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I am writing as the President of the Anne Arundel County Branch of the NAACP.

Teenagers today face many stressors that they may not want to discuss with their parents. Current law, however, states that they must be 16 to consent to mental health diagnosis, consultation, and treatment without parental notification.

The mental health landscape for young people has changed drastically in recent years. Because of technology, children today may face their stressors on a near-constant basis, exacerbating any underlying mental health issues they may have.

According to the CDC, approximately one in five children in the US today has a diagnosable mental health condition. These children already face stigma from their peers and society that can deter them from asking for help—they do not need to face the added hurdle of fear that their parents will be told to prevent them from seeking care.

For minors whose parents stigmatize mental health problems or are unsupportive of their child’s identity, fear that their parents could be told they are seeking help could prevent them from accessing the care they urgently need.

Stigma and a lack of anonymity of behavioral health treatment contribute to delays in seeking care and underuse of care. Addressing rural-urban disparities in neighborhood resources that allow children to play, read, and socialize also might present opportunities for prevention and treatment.

This bill removes that barrier by stating that, if parental notification will deter the minor from seeking care, a provider does not have to notify the minor’s parents. HB 132 does not state that a provider must give a minor care, but rather that they may determine if parental notification is in the minor’s best interest. Further, this bill does not extend to prescribing medication as it relates to this statute.

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Additionally, this bill does not prohibit providers from seeking parental consent if they deem it is in the best interest of the minor child. Under most circumstances, providers will still seek consent from the parent or legal guardian before treating a minor child. It is only if they believe parental notification will deter the minor from seeking care that they can choose to not notify the minor's parents.

This bill will eliminate a barrier many minors face in seeking mental health treatment and help ensure that some of our most vulnerable young people are able to get the mental health help they need.

Thank you and I ask for a favorable report on HB 132