

MARYLAND COALITION TO REFORM SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE HOUSE BILL 377: COMMISSION ON STUDENT BEHAVIORAL HEALTH AND MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT

FEBRUARY 3, 2021

POSITION: SUPPORT

The Maryland Coalition to Reform School Discipline (“CRSD”) brings together advocates, service providers, and community members dedicated to transforming school discipline practices within Maryland’s public-school systems. We are committed to making discipline responsive to students’ behavioral needs, fair, appropriate to the infraction, and designed to keep youth on track to graduate. **CRSD strongly supports House Bill 377**, which would establish the Commission on Student Behavioral Health and Mental Health Treatment (“Commission”). The Commission would, *inter alia*, study treatment and practices for students experiencing behavioral health and mental health issues and make recommendations to improve such practices.

The mental health crisis among youth has risen dramatically in recent years. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, “[o]ne in five youth have a mental health condition, with half of mental health conditions developing by age 14.”¹ The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (“CDC”) reports that “ADHD, behavior problems, anxiety, and depression are the most commonly diagnosed mental disorders in children[.]”² Also, “[t]he suicide rate for persons aged 10-14 . . . nearly tripled from 2007 to 2017”³ and “[t]he suicide rate for persons aged 15-19 . . . increased 76% from 2007 . . . to 2017 . . .”⁴ The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry explains that “[t]he majority of children and adolescents who attempt suicide have a significant mental health disorder, usually depression.”⁵ Moreover, not only are children experiencing their own mental health issues, but they are also witnessing their peers struggling with these issues as well.⁶

¹ NAT’L ALLIANCE ON MENTAL ILLNESS, MENTAL HEALTH IN SCHOOLS, <https://www.nami.org/Advocacy/Policy-Priorities/Intervene-Early/Mental-Health-in-Schools>.

² U.S. DEP’T OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVS. CTRS. FOR DISEASE CONTROL & PREVENTION, DATA AND STATISTICS ON CHILDREN’S MENTAL HEALTH, <https://www.cdc.gov/childrensmentalhealth/data.html>.

³ SALLY C. CURTIN, M.A., & MELONIE HERON, Ph.D., U.S. DEP’T OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVS. CTRS. FOR DISEASE CONTROL & PREVENTION, NAT’L CTR. FOR HEALTH STATISTICS, DEATH RATES DUE TO SUICIDE AND HOMICIDE AMONG PERSONS AGED 10-24: UNITED STATES, 2000-2017 2 (October 2019), <https://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/81944>.

⁴ *Id.* at 3.

⁵ AM. ACAD. OF CHILD & ADOLESCENT PSYCHIATRY, SUICIDE IN CHILDREN AND TEENS (June 2018), https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Facts_for_Families/FFF-Guide/Teen-Suicide-010.aspx.

⁶ *See generally*, JULIANA MENASCE HOROWITZ & NIKKI GRAF, PEW RESEARCH CTR, MOST U.S. TEENS SEE ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION AS A MAJOR PROBLEM AMONG THEIR PEERS (February 20, 2019), <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2019/02/Pew-Research-Center-Teens-report-full-2.pdf>.

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Thus, these struggles are commonplace for our youth, including in Maryland. A recent Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration survey found that from 2016 to 2019, 15.7% of Maryland’s children ages 12 to 17 suffered a major depressive episode annually, exceeding both the regional and national averages.⁷

The COVID-19 pandemic has worsened the mental health crisis confronting our youth. Since March 2020, the CDC has reported a 24% spike nationwide in mental-health-related emergency room visits among children between 5 and 11 years-old and a 31% rise among children between 12 and 17 years-old.⁸ In a recent study, America’s Promise Alliance interviewed 3,300 students aged 13 to 19 throughout the United States, 33% of whom expressed “that they have more often been feeling unhappy or depressed” and 29% stated that “they do not feel connected at all to school adults” since the onset of virtual learning.⁹ Sadly, the pandemic is exacting a heavy mental and physical toll on our youth.¹⁰

Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused great educational harm. This is particularly so for students with diagnosed learning challenges, who are unable to access services and supports necessary to thrive,¹¹ and Black and Latinx students, who are suffering greater learning loss vis-à-vis their peers. Indeed, researchers from the University of Maryland, College Park, after interviewing students, parents, educators, and staff members from Montgomery County Public Schools, explained that “the transition to online learning has created greater burdens for underserved Black, Latino, and low-income students whose families are more directly impacted by both the health and economic crises of the pandemic.”¹²

Despite the mental health crisis confronting children, “fewer than half receive any mental health services.”¹³ Therefore, it is crucial that schools respond to and address student mental health and behavioral health issues. For many children, schools are the *only* place where they receive support for these challenges. Of students who receive mental health services, “nearly two[-] thirds do so only in school” and “research has shown that students are more likely to seek

⁷ SUBSTANCE ABUSE & MENTAL HEALTH SERVS. ADMIN., BEHAVIOR HEALTH BAROMETER: MARYLAND 6 (2020), https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/reports/rpt32837/Maryland-BH-Barometer_Volume6.pdf.

⁸ Dan Levin, *How the Pandemic Has Been Devastating for Children from Low-Income Families*, NY TIMES (Dec. 29, 2020),

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/29/us/coronavirus-trauma-young-people.html?searchResultPosition=1>.

⁹ AMERICA’S PROMISE ALLIANCE, THE STATE OF YOUNG PEOPLE DURING COVID-19: FINDINGS FROM A NATIONALLY REPRESENTATIVE SURVEY OF HIGH SCHOOL YOUTH 1 (2020),

https://www.americaspromise.org/sites/default/files/d8/YouthDuringCOVID_FINAL%20%281%29.pdf.

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ Perri Klass, M.D., *The Pandemic’s Toll on Children with Special Needs and Their Parents*, N.Y. TIMES, Jul. 27, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/27/well/family/children-special-needs-pandemic.html>.

¹² AMY LEWIN, PSYD & KEVIN ROY, PHD, UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND THE BLACK AND BROWN COALITION FOR EDUCATIONAL EQUITY AND EXCELLENCE, SECURING EDUCATIONAL EQUITY: LEARNING FROM THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF BLACK, LATINO, AND LOW-INCOME FAMILIES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND BEYOND 2 (October 2020),

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5e83a7b8388c7627b9ee5305/t/5f882437a612636f97a366aa/1602757688203/FINAL--Securing+Educational+Equity+Report+-+Black+and+Brown+Coalition+10-6-20+.pdf>.

¹³ NAT’L ALLIANCE ON MENTAL ILLNESS, *supra* note 1.

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counseling when services are available in schools.”¹⁴ Thus, the COVID-19 pandemic has taken these supports and services away from students in desperate need.

Mental health supports are necessary for students to not only improve their lives, but also to adapt to and thrive in school. Students who receive mental health supports perform better academically.¹⁵ These services also improve behavior and support students who experience trauma.¹⁶

HB 377 understands that students need mental health support inside and outside the classroom. This bill recognizes, however, that these mental health challenges are both common and complex. As such, the bill takes the correct step by calling for a Commission to study and analyze the issues, and then make recommendations to improve the mental health and behavioral health services provided to students. The Commission would include in its important work the broad array of mental health issues and challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic continues to present. Thus, this bill aims to better help students address these issues, improve their lives, and thrive in school. If enacted, HB 377 will make schools better places for all children, teachers, administrators, and staff.

For these reasons, CRSD strongly supports House Bill 377.

For more information contact:

Jennifer Frederick,* Matthew Williams,* and Michael Pinard
Youth, Education and Justice Clinic, University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law
410-706-3295; jlfrederick@clinic.law.umaryland.edu;
matthewwilliams@clinic.law.umaryland.edu; mpinard@law.umaryland.edu

CRSD Members

Organizations

ACLU of Maryland
The Arc, Maryland
Attendance Works
BMore Awesome, Inc.
The Choice Program at UMBC
Community Law in Action

¹⁴ NAT’L ASS’N OF SCH. PSYCHOLOGISTS, SCHOOL-BASED MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES: IMPROVING STUDENT LEARNING AND WELL-BEING, <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/mental-health/school-psychology-and-mental-health/school-based-mental-health-services>.

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ See NAT’L ASS’N OF STATE MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAM DIRECTORS, SCHOOLS AS A VITAL COMPONENT OF THE CHILD AND ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEM 4 (2019) (“A strong research literature . . . demonstrat[es] that integrating mental health systems directly into schools leads to positive social, emotional, behavioral, and academic outcomes.”), https://www.nasmhpd.org/sites/default/files/TAC_Paper_9_508C.pdf.

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Disability Rights Maryland
Family League of Baltimore
NARAL-Pro-Choice Maryland
Maryland Office of the Public Defender
Open Society Institute – Baltimore,
Project HEAL at Kennedy Krieger Institute
Public Justice Center
Restorative Counseling Services
Strong Schools Maryland
Teachers Democracy Project
Youth, Education and Justice Clinic, University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law

Individuals

Gail L. Sunderman
Janna Parker
Shannon McFadden
Kelsie Reed
Lindsay Gavin, Ph.D.

*Student attorneys practicing pursuant to Rule 19-220 of the Maryland Rules Governing Admission to the Bar