



Delegate Anne R. Kaiser, Chair
Delegate Alonzo T. Washington, Vice Chair
Ways and Means Committee
House Office Building, Room 131
Annapolis, MD 21401

Bill: House Bill 377 – Commission on Student Behavioral Health and Mental Health Treatment

Position: Support

Dear Chairman Kaiser, Vice Chair Washington, and Members of the Committee:

I am writing on behalf of the Maryland School Psychologists' Association (MSPA), a professional organization representing about 500 school psychologists in Maryland. We advocate for the social-emotional, behavioral, and academic wellbeing of students and families across the state.

School psychologists provide comprehensive services to Maryland's students. These include evaluations, consultation, intervention, and perhaps most important of all, direct provision mental health services. HB377 creates a commission to evaluate guidelines related to behavioral health practices in Maryland schools. The commission will make recommendations to improve current practices and ensure efforts are as efficient and effective as possible.

Schools are increasingly called on to provide mental and behavioral health services to students. According to the CDC, one in five children and adolescents experience a significant mental health problem during their early school years. These same statistics indicate that approximately 75-80% of those children will not receive any mental health treatment. This is for a variety of reasons, but is largely due to lack of access. Even students whose families have adequate health insurance struggle to find providers in the community, many of whom do not accept any insurance plans. The National Association of School Psychologists reports that of students who do receive mental health treatment, about 80% of that treatment is provided in schools by qualified providers such as school psychologists, school counselors, and school social workers. Importantly, each of these groups of providers is specially qualified and credentialed to provide such services in educational settings, which requires a specialized skill set.

The Commission created by HB377 is needed in Maryland. This Commission should not be considered duplicative of the Lt. Governor's Commission to Study Mental and Behavioral Health in Maryland. Though the Youth and Families Subcommittee's work, while crucially important, does not focus on the specific issue of providing mental health services in schools. For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on HB377. If we can provide any additional information or be of any assistance, please contact us at legislative@mspaonline.org or our policy consultant, Rachael Faulkner, at rfaulkner@policypartners.net or 410-693-4000.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kyle Potter".

Kyle Potter, Ph.D., NCSP
Chair, Legislative Committee
Maryland School Psychologists' Association