

VASSAR COLLEGE
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES

SB 832/HB 1098

February 26, 2022

Re: Maryland Higher Ed Legislation for Students with Chronic Health Conditions

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Margot Schinella and I am a Family Nurse Practitioner and the Director of Health Services at Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, New York. To provide context, Vassar College is a highly selective, residential, coeducational liberal arts college with approximately 2,500 enrolled students. Our campus culture seeks to promote an environment of equality, diversity, and inclusivity.

I am reaching out today in support of legislation that would require public institutions of higher education to designate a case manager. In my experience, case managers are an extremely valuable asset to a college campus, especially in regard to supporting students with chronic health conditions.

In the summer of 2020, Vassar College created a Vassar Together committee to develop plans to reopen campus during the COVID-19 pandemic. The primary focus was to safely return students to an in-person learning and living environment. Protecting and supporting our most at-risk individuals, including our students with chronic health conditions, was of paramount concern. During the committee discussions it became evident that the creation of a case management role was essential to provide Vassar students with support for their health and well-being while transitioning back to campus in the midst of a global pandemic.

Despite the case manager position being a new concept for Vassar College in 2020, the services were so heavily utilized that it became necessary to add a second case manager to the team after only one academic year. In addition to executing their daily roles and responsibilities in the 2020-2021 academic year, the case manager provided on-going services for 7% of our student population, had intensive sessions with 45 students for severe mental health concerns, and assisted 12% of our population in obtaining off-campus COVID vaccines.

Case management duties and responsibilities are varied and extensive. Highlighted below are a few of the services that the case management team offers to Vassar College students:

- Refers and connects students to healthcare resources both on and off campus
- Educates students in self-advocacy
- Supports students in navigating insurance issues
- Assesses needs of students who are struggling academically or socially and develops solution-oriented goals
- Coordinates care for students transitioning between on-campus care and care in their home communities
- Provides emotional support and outreach to students in distress, i.e., psychological, physical, social, or financial
- Collaborates with local hospitals to develop safe discharge plans for students returning to campus after a medical or mental health hospitalization
- Assists students transitioning back to campus after taking a leave of absence

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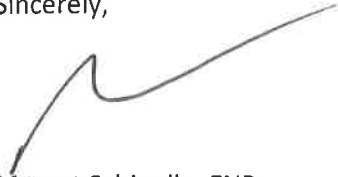
The benefit of a case management position to a college community is immeasurable. The presence of a case manager not only improves and enhances the student's academic and social experience, but it serves as an educational resource in instilling essential life skills. Although all students benefit from these services, having access to a case manager is integral to the success of students with chronic health conditions. These students often require additional, and sometimes specialized, resources and assistance to achieve their academic potential. The case manager can act as a liaison and advocate for the students in so far as they can collaboratively work to identify and access appropriate resources that will facilitate student academic success and future well-being.

Many students with chronic health conditions have time-consuming concerns. These cannot always be effectively addressed in busy college health clinics or counseling centers which is where the role of the case manager becomes crucial. I recently had a medical visit with a student with Type I diabetes. Prior to enrolling in college, their diabetes was well managed under the care of their mother and specialists. Since attending college away from home, they found themselves struggling not only with their glucose control, but with depression and anxiety as well. The challenges this student faced were multi-faceted and they clearly needed specialized care locally, but they were unable to navigate this alone. Thankfully we were able to engage the case manager to personally work with the student and their insurance to successfully establish care with appropriate providers in the community.

In summary, it has become evident that case managers are essential to the wellness of students and the success of Vassar College as an institution. Case managers support students in many dimensions of wellness including physical, emotional, financial, social, intellectual, and occupational. Without this personalized support in place for students in need, the college experience and successful graduation would be compromised. The case manager is also fundamental to cultivating a thriving campus culture focused on equality and inclusivity. By assisting students with accessing services and reducing barriers that might otherwise preclude students from achieving their highest potential, our case management team supports Vassar's mission to create an environment in which all members are valued and empowered to thrive. Vassar College has benefited greatly from the addition of this key team member because a supported student is a successful student!

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Margot Schinella, FNP

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