



Montgomery County Mental health Advisory Committee

January 26, 2022

HB118

Delegate Luke Clippinger
101 Taylor House Office Building
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Chair Clippinger:

The Mental Health Advisory Committee of Montgomery County (MHAC), as mandated by the State of Maryland, is dedicated to monitoring the delivery of mental health services to county residents. The Committee also collaborates with community partners to advise and advocate for an effective comprehensive mental health system of care for all. Reducing stigma and expanding access to mental health services, particularly within schools, is one of our main priorities.

As such, we are writing to express our support for HB118 (MM/ERG) - Public Schools – Student Attendance – Excused Absences for Mental Health Needs, which provides that absences from school for mental health needs are lawful absences under certain circumstances. Further, it will require students with such absences to meet with a school mental health specialist within a certain period of time.

Supporting our students and school personnel and promoting positive mental health has taken on new urgency with the social and health challenges of the pandemic. Our children are suffering from the pandemic's impacts on daily life and learning, seeing the economic harm to their families, and feeling the pain and worry of their caregivers. They deserve to be comforted and need opportunities to heal.

Despite a decades-old federal parity law, our society has been slow to fully understand and accept that mental health concerns should be treated as seriously as physical health concerns. Pervasive stigma remains. We want to encourage our youth to speak up and seek the support they may need. We need to reinforce how we care for their well-being and give them permission to take mental health concerns seriously. Their mental health needs to be made a higher priority and a standard of care.

Over the last year, several states have included mental health as one of the reasons that a student could be officially excused for their absence from school, or specifically allotting mental health days during the school year. As a result, more students are having open conversations about the importance of mental health and the way their schools address it.

We urge you to support HB 118 to allow Excused Absences for Mental Health Needs. While we support a more comprehensive effort to invest in school mental health programs and personnel but measures like this take steps to promote opportunities for care, change attitudes and remove stigma.

Behavioral Health and Crisis Services • Child and Adolescent Behavioral Health Services

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We strongly urge you support this bill and thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Helga Luest". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Helga Luest, Chair