

House Bill 612 Public Schools – Lifesaver Schools Program - Establishment
House Ways and Means Committee
February 12, 2025
Position: SUPPORT

Mental Health Association of Maryland (MHAMD) is a nonprofit education and advocacy organization that brings together consumers, families, clinicians, advocates and concerned citizens for unified action in all aspects of mental health and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as behavioral health). We appreciate the opportunity to provide this testimony in support of House Bill 612.

HB 612 requires that a Lifesavers School Program be established to recognize schools that make an extraordinary effort to address the physical and mental health of their students. While both physical and mental health are important, this testimony will address the need to support the mental wellness of students.

For over a decade the mental health of children and youth has been worsening. In the 10 years leading up to the COVID pandemic, depression increased by about 40% in young people,¹ and the mental health of youth deteriorated dramatically in the wake of the pandemic. In 2021, the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) and the Children’s Hospital Association (CHA) joined together to declare a National State of Emergency in Children’s Mental Health.² Maryland youth have not been immune to these trends. Data from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey of 2022-23 shows that 28% of Maryland high school students and 22% of middle school students reported that their mental health was not good most of the time or always, and 18% of high school students and 24% of middle school students reported that they had seriously considered suicide.³

Promoting youth mental wellness is a key way to address these alarming trends. Indeed, the number one recommendation of the U.S. Department of Education’s report, “Supporting Child and Student Social, Emotional, Behavioral and Mental Health Needs” is to prioritize wellness for every child, student, educator and provider.⁴

Schools that go above and beyond to support student mental wellness deserve recognition and this can encourage other schools to do the same. For this reason, MHAMD supports HB 612 and urges a favorable report.

¹ Kids’ mental health is in crisis. Here’s what psychologists are doing to help. American Academy of Pediatrics. January 1, 2023. Accessed January 14, 2023. <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2023/01/trends-improving-youth-mental-health>

² A declaration from the American Academy of Pediatrics, American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Children’s Hospital Association. American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. October 2021. Accessed January 14, 2023. <https://www.aap.org/en/advocacy/child-and-adolescent-healthy-mental-development/aap-aacap-cha-declaration-of-a-national-emergency-in-child-and-adolescent-mental-health/>

³ Maryland Department of Health releases 2022-2023 Youth Risk Behavioral Survey and Youth Tobacco Survey data. Maryland Department of Health. June 25, 2024. <https://health.maryland.gov/phpa/ccdpc/Reports/Pages/YRBS-2022-2023.aspx>

⁴Supporting child and student social, emotional, behavioral, and mental health needs. U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services. Washington, DC. p.19. 2021. Accessed January 14, 2023. <https://www2.ed.gov/documents/students/supporting-child-student-social-emotional-behavioral-mental-health.pdf>.