

**SB 602 – Algorithmic Addiction Fund - Establishment**

Senate Finance Committee

February 24, 2026

**Position: FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENT**

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 SB 602.

SB 602 would establish a fund to retain any revenue received from settlements regarding harm to children from the use of social media and the use of algorithms that can lead to social media addiction. The bill directs that dollars in the fund should go to algorithmic addiction prevention, intervention and treatment, and to treatment for mental health conditions that result from algorithmic addiction. In addition, it requires that any unspent funds should be used by the Department of Health for youth mental health services.

In 2023, the Maryland Attorney General along with 41 other state Attorneys General filed several lawsuits against Meta, claiming that Meta employed algorithms designed to addict children and youth to their social media platforms, thereby harming young people's mental and physical health. If the state receives any awards from this lawsuit or other similar lawsuits, SB 602 directs that the revenue would go into the Algorithmic Addiction Fund.

It is certainly the case that the need for mental health care that addresses the unique needs of young Marylanders has never been greater. In the 10 years leading up to the COVID pandemic, depression increased by about 40% in young people,<sup>1</sup> and these mental health challenges increased dramatically in the wake of the pandemic. Data from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey of 2022-23 shows that 28% of Maryland high school students reported that their mental health was not good most of the time or always, and 24% of middle school students reported that they had seriously considered suicide.<sup>2</sup>

Many point to social media as a contributing factor to this disturbing trend. There is a growing body of research that indicates that social media can have a profound risk of harm to the mental health of young people. According to the U.S. Surgeon General, "social media platforms

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

<sup>2</sup> 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>

are often designed to maximize user engagement, which has the potential to encourage excessive use and behavioral dysregulation.” Social media use by youth is nearly universal. Up to 95% of youth ages 13–17 report using a social media platform, with more than a third saying they use social media “almost constantly.”<sup>3</sup>

Given the worsening mental health of Maryland youth and the ever-increasing evidence that excessive use of social media platforms has contributed to this crisis, it makes sense to direct any relevant settlement revenues to address youth mental health.

**MHAMD proposes an amendment to the bill that would direct any unspent settlement funds to the Consortium on Coordinated Community Supports, established by the Blueprint legislation, to provide behavioral health services to students.**

Over the last several years, investments in student behavioral health by the Consortium have shown outstanding results. In the 2024-25 school year, Consortium-funded programs served more than 137,000 students in 86% of Maryland’s schools. 705 new behavioral health workforce members were hired, and 6,000 school staff were trained in behavioral health practices. Students demonstrated significant improvement across all three levels of intervention – preventative, targeted, and intensive, and almost 90% of students and families reported satisfaction with the behavioral health services received.<sup>4</sup>

Since its establishment, funding for the Consortium has been at risk. In 2025, the BRFA proposed cutting funding from \$120 million per year to \$40 million per year. The General Assembly was able to restore some dollars and fund the Consortium at a level of \$100 million/year. This year the BRFA again proposes cutting funding, this time by \$20 million/year. Without a sustainable funding mechanism, programs will remain at risk of shutting down and investments made thus far lost, to the detriment of Maryland’s students.

Because of the dramatic need for school-based behavioral health services and the extraordinary impact of Consortium grants, it is critical that there be a dedicated funding stream for the Consortium. The dollars that SB 602, as amended, could bring to the Consortium are urgently needed, therefore we urge a favorable report.

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<sup>3</sup> U.S. Surgeon General. Social Media and Mental Health. 2023. Accessed February 12, 2024. <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/sg-youth-mental-health-social-media-advisory.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Consortium on Coordinated Community Supports Statewide Impact Report, July – September 2025. [https://health.maryland.gov/mchrc/Documents/001%20-%20Holding%20Folder%20for%20Documents/2025%20Documents/12%20-%20December/Year%201%20Statewide%20Consortium%20Impact.FINAL\\_Acc.pdf](https://health.maryland.gov/mchrc/Documents/001%20-%20Holding%20Folder%20for%20Documents/2025%20Documents/12%20-%20December/Year%201%20Statewide%20Consortium%20Impact.FINAL_Acc.pdf)