

# Maryland lawmakers announce \$111 in mental health funding for child-serving organizations

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Credit: Robert Kraft/public domain

Maryland state lawmakers, on Feb. 20, announced \$111 million in grant funding for child-serving organizations across the state to help them bolster their behavioral health service offerings, including counseling,

early intervention and parent encouragement programs.

The grants, which were awarded to 129 Maryland [community organizations](#)—including 11 in Baltimore City and eight in Baltimore County—represented the culmination of a months-long process by the state Consortium on Coordinated Community Supports to gather proposals and decide which ones to fund.

The 25-member group, chaired by former Del. David Rudolph, a Cecil County Democrat, was created in 2021 as part of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future, a multi-billion dollar investment to boost the state's schools. The consortium is charged with developing a statewide framework for expanding access to comprehensive behavioral health and wraparound services for Maryland students.

On Tuesday, lawmakers highlighted the urgent need for improved mental health resources for the state's children.

"Never before have young people faced so many challenges in such a rapid, short period of time. The stress and strains that dominate a young person's life today via [social media](#), the pandemic's effect on learning or socialization have undoubtedly harmed our children," said Senate President Bill Ferguson, a Democrat from Baltimore, at the news conference.

"That's why today I am hopeful that our historic investment in Maryland school-aged children for behavioral health services will have an immediate and positive impact in the coming months."

In Baltimore, the grants were awarded to organizations such as the United Way of Central Maryland, the University of Maryland School of Medicine and Johns Hopkins University to provide services like [suicide prevention](#), parenting coaching and peer support groups.

Baltimore County awardees included Associated Catholic Charities, Hope Health Systems, Nexus Wellness Group and Lighthouse.

With the funding, community organizations will provide after-school programs that teach children social and [emotional skills](#) such as stress management techniques, coping strategies and relaxation training, Maryland Health Secretary Laura Herrera Scott said at the news conference. Organizations also will offer services including psychiatric rehabilitation, substance use treatment and family education, she said.

"Our next generation can grow with the tools they need to overcome personal challenges, especially those that can sometimes lead to tragic outcomes," Herrera Scott said. "Under the Blueprint for Maryland's Future and with the great work of the consortium, these grants help us ensure that students throughout Maryland have equitable access to behavioral health services."

The grants, which will provide funding to organizations through next year's spring semester, include a \$26.6 million investment in [early intervention](#) services and more than \$25 million for substance abuse treatment and recovery, said Sen. Katie Fry Hester, who is a member of the consortium. More than \$50 million will support family and parent support services "because our children's success starts at home," said the Democrat who represents portions of Howard and Montgomery counties.

While the pandemic exacerbated the mental [health](#) challenges faced by students, they were struggling even before that. The suicide rate among teenage boys has doubled since 2010 and among girls, it has tripled, Hester said at the news conference.

The grants announced Tuesday, however, give Hester hope.

"I know that our kids will do better and we have a brighter tomorrow

because of this \$111 million invested in them," she said.

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