



HB 152 – Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act

Committee: Appropriations

Date: February 27, 2020

POSITION: Oppose Behavioral Health Rate Cut

The Maryland Coalition of Families: Maryland Coalition of Families (MCF) helps families who care for someone with behavioral health needs. Using personal experience as parents, caregivers and other loved ones, our staff provide one-to-one peer support and navigation services to parents and caregivers of young people with mental health issues and to any loved one who cares for someone with a substance use or gambling issue.

MCF strongly opposes the behavioral health rate cut of 2% that was included in HB 152.

The 4% rate increase that was passed in the minimum wage bill of the 2019 legislative session must be restored. That increase, along with the rate increase in the HOPE Act of the 2017 legislative session, were meant to address decades of underfunding of behavioral health services. Low rates for behavioral health services have led to a shortage of providers and high staff turnover.

We are particularly concerned about the shortage of providers that specialize in working with children and adolescents. Families wait for months to see an appropriate provider. Then, they are disheartened to find that staff turnover is extraordinarily high. Their child may form a bond with a therapist, only to have it broken and have to start over with another therapist. This leads to bad outcomes.

Moreover, because of the extreme shortage of child and adolescent clinicians, many families are resorting to having their child seen by adult providers. Children with mental health problems should receive treatment tailored to their needs, just as children should receive somatic care from a pediatrician and not an internist. They should not be forced to see adult providers because no child and adolescent clinicians are readily available.

It is not just children who experience shortages and a high turnover of clinicians. Adults too report having to tell their story over and over again as their mental health or substance use providers move on. It can be impossible to form a trusting relationship, which is critical to recovery.

Provider shortages and high staff turnover are both directly related to inadequate compensation. The \$25 million cut must be restored.

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