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SB 192 Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act of 2020

Budget and Taxation Committee

February 26, 2020

Position: OPPOSE BEHAVIORAL HEALTH RATE CUTS

The Mental Health Association of Maryland 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, mental illness and substance use. **We appreciate the opportunity to present this testimony on Senate Bill 192.**

The Maryland General Assembly has taken several important steps in recent years to address a behavioral health crisis that is devastating families across the state. We are making progress, but we are not out of the woods yet. Unmet need persists, resources remain scarce, and we are at risk of undermining the progress we have made.

Overdose deaths increased in 2018 for the eighth year in a row, reaching an all-time high of 2,406. And while these deaths decreased by four percent during the first nine months of 2019, a total of 1,774 Marylanders still lost their lives to overdose during that time. Maryland suicides are increasing dramatically, and demand for mental health and substance use treatment has risen steadily since 2008, with nearly 300,000 Maryland children and adults currently using and depending on the state's public behavioral health system.

Despite the severity of this situation, it remains increasingly difficult for Marylanders to access affordable and efficient mental health and substance use treatment when and where needed. Health care costs have risen and demand for community behavioral health treatment has exploded, but funding for these services has not kept pace with the need.

Long overdue multi-year provider rate increases were included in the HOPE Act of 2017 and minimum wage legislation in 2019. But SB 192 as drafted would undermine those commitments, cutting a mandated rate increase in FY21 from 4% to 2% (pg. 16, line 18). If left unrestored, **this cut will underfund community mental health and substance use treatment by nearly \$25 million.**

The slight decrease in overdose deaths in 2019 is proof that increasing resources for community behavioral health saves lives. It is critical that we do not pull the rug out from under our public behavioral health providers just as Maryland is turning a corner in this overdose crisis. **We urge you to reject the proposed cut to FY21 provider reimbursement rate increases and to implement the full 4% increase without delay.**

For more information, please contact Dan Martin at (410) 978-8865