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Marshall Rock, LCSW-C
Executive Director

February 12, 2020

Senator Andrew Serafini,
Washington County District 2
James Senate Office Office Building, Room 321
11 Bladen St.
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Senator Serafini,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony for Senate Bill 501, Maryland Loan Assistance Repayment Program for Physicians and Physician 2 Assistants – Administration and Funding.

An examination of data provided by the Maryland Department of Health, Behavioral Health Administration, has shown a steady increase in the number of Washington County residents who are seeking behavioral health treatment. Washington County continues to have a high level of poverty and has not kept pace with the rest of the State in economic recovery since the most recent recession. According to Fiscal Year 2017 data, Washington County ranked 7th in the State of Maryland for all ages in total percent of population in poverty. In FY 19, 44,326 Washington County residents, or 29.4% of the total County population, were eligible for Medicaid benefits. Maryland Department of Health data shows that as of September 30, 2019, of the 44,326 Washington County residents, 8,772 individuals received some type of service through the Public Behavioral Health System for behavioral health treatment covered by Medicaid. The Medicaid Penetration Rate is the percent of people who have Medicaid insurance coverage and are accessing behavioral health treatment. The Medicaid Penetration Rate for FY 19 for Washington County residents was 19.8% compared to the State average of 15.3%.

An article in Health e Careers, June 27, 2019, "The Truth about the Psychiatrist Shortage" cited that a national physician recruiting firm reported that the most recent numbers from 2018 revealed that for the third consecutive year, "psychiatrists were second on the list of most requested recruiting assignments, reflecting a severe shortage of mental health professionals nationwide."

In addition, that same article reports that "the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) documented in its comprehensive April 2019 report on physician supply and demand, the situation is

quite dire. In 2017, approximately 13.55 million adults reported an unmet need for mental health services and one in five people couldn't find treatment but instead found barriers to getting it.”

AAMC also “determined that 5,906 psychiatrists were needed in 2017 to fill the gap, leaving demand at 13.5 percent more than supply. Using predictive modeling, the organization predicts a shortage of 3,400 psychiatrists by 2032.”

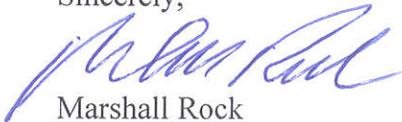
Washington County residents experience challenges in accessing specialized behavioral health services due to the rural nature of the County. Behavioral health providers in Washington County have difficulty recruiting physicians and physician’s assistants with specific training in that field of treatment. Washington County has difficulty recruiting against the metropolitan areas for physicians specializing in behavioral health due to a perceived lack of cultural advantages in rural areas.

Due to the demand of increasing behavioral health needs in Washington County, the predicted shortage of psychiatrists in the coming years, and the difficulty recruiting psychiatrists to Washington County, a “perfect storm” is occurring that will greatly impact the quality of life for Washington residents and the health of the County overall.

Senate Bill 501 is primarily focused on incentivizing physicians and physician’s assistants engaged in primary care or medical residents specializing in primary care who agree to practice in a geographic area of the State that has been designated by the Secretary as being medically underserved. The result of this bill may assist with relieving some of the impact of the predicted psychiatry shortage by providing an alternative for primary behavioral health issues to be addressed at the primary care level which may head off more serious, chronic behavioral health needs.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

Sincerely,



Marshall Rock
Director