



February 4, 2020

The Honorable Delores G. Kelley  
Senate Finance Committee  
3 East Miller Senate Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Support– SB 324: Veterans - Behavioral Health Services - Mental Health First Aid

Dear Chairman Kelley and Honorable Members of the Committee:

The Maryland Psychiatric Society (MPS) is a state medical organization whose physician members specialize in the diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of mental illnesses including substance use disorders. Formed more than sixty years ago to support the needs of psychiatrists and their patients, MPS works to ensure available, accessible and comprehensive quality mental health resources for all Maryland citizens; and strives through public education to dispel the stigma and discrimination of those suffering from a mental illness. As the district branch of the American Psychiatric Association covering the state of Maryland excluding the D.C. suburbs, MPS represents over 700 psychiatrists as well as physicians currently in psychiatric training.

MPS supports Senate Bill 324 (SB 324). The United States has been actively involved in military conflicts for almost two decades with many United States military personnel serving multiple deployments to places such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and Africa. Deployments of this nature are extremely stressful situations as modern-day combat has become much more non-conventional. Rates of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and other psychiatric illnesses are extremely high with our military veterans. Unfortunately, suicide amongst active-duty soldiers and veterans has become all too commonplace. The United States Department of Veterans Affairs and the individual branches of the United State military are struggling to provide mental health care to both veterans and soldiers alike. Maryland, through bills such as SB 324, is taking thoughtful steps in assisting veterans and their families to heal.

SB 324 if codified will increase awareness of mental illness and substance use disorders as well as attune our community to the idea of early intervention. The training guidelines of SB 324 will reduce stigmas associated with mental illness and treatment; connect more military personnel and veterans to meaningful mental health services; potentially reduce fatalities due to overdose and suicide in the military community, and establish the complex support system that co-morbid conditions create.



Therefore, MPS asks the committee for a favorable report. If you have any questions with regard to this testimony, please feel free to contact Thomas Tompsett Jr. at [tommy.tompsett@mdlobbyist.com](mailto:tommy.tompsett@mdlobbyist.com).

Respectfully submitted,  
The Legislative Action Committee for the Maryland Psychiatric Society