

## **Dr. Mary Ann Booth's Written Testimony in Support of HB 1461**

Dear Chairman Pendergrass, Vice Chair Pena Melnyk, and Members of the Health and Government Operations Committee:

I am writing on behalf of my patients to ask for your support of HB1461. I am a board certified child and adolescent psychiatrist, who has been seeing children, adolescents, and adults in the public mental health sector since 2010.

Telepsychiatry has been a large part of my practice since 2010, and I have seen patients in both Western Maryland and the Eastern shore, as well as my home county, Harford County.

I am going to be sharing a patient story today in my oral testimony to highlight the complexity of some of the patients I have seen and the need for a medical director who is a physician to be able to medically manage those complex patients.

A child and adolescent psychiatrist receives approximately 15,000 hours of direct patient care clinical training during residency and fellowship. The psychiatrist in training (medical resident) will practice with growing autonomy under a senior physician (attending psychiatrist) in the care of patients living with neurodevelopmental disorders, cognitive impairment, mood disorders, post-traumatic stress disorders, schizophrenia, and anxiety, to name but a few. It is this growing autonomy that will form the basis of that individual physician's ability to lead a treatment team as a medical director. The amount of clinical hours allow that physician to develop both pattern recognition which is important to be able to correctly diagnose patients and also flexibility of thinking which is crucial when treating the most complex patients.

Nurse practitioners are valuable members of the health care team in treating stable patients with psychiatric illness and providing psychoeducation to patients. Nevertheless, there have been valid concerns raised by the American Medical Association, the American Psychiatry Association, the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and nurse practitioners themselves regarding the variability of nurse practitioner education and the proliferation of direct entry on-

line programs. An individual can obtain an R.N. license, enter an on-line NP program, and become a nurse practitioner with 500 hours or 4 months of direct patient care hours. Would it be possible to have the breadth of training after 4 months to medically manage the most complex patient cases as medical director of an outpatient mental health clinic?

Treating children with mental health needs is a huge responsibility. Often the children who enter the public mental system are amongst the most psychiatrically and medically complex. We need all mental health professionals with their unique talents working together to treat our kids in the public mental health sector. The roles of nurse practitioner and physician are not interchangeable and never were meant to be.

A medical director is not such an administrative role. A medical director oversees the clinical management of the most complex patients as well as leading the team in delivering safe and effective care to all patients at the clinic.

Telepsychiatry is a vital tool to connect our psychiatrists in the central parts of Maryland with citizens living in Western Maryland and the Eastern Shore. During my time as a telepsychiatrist at Chesapeake Health Care on the Eastern Shore I was able to care for over 700 families, many of those living with autism and intellectual disabilities. The program ended because of insurance reimbursement issues surrounding the “hub and spoke” telehealth model in Maryland but new laws continue to be enacted to increase the viability of its use.

SB 178, which passed just last year, allows medical directors to fulfill their roles and responsibilities exclusively through the use of telepsychiatry/telemedicine. I believe this change, along with strengthening current resources, will give every Marylander, regardless of socioeconomic status, the quality care they deserve.

Sincerely,

Mary Ann Booth, M.D.

Board Certified Child, Adolescent, and Adult Psychiatrist