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SB 568 - Health Care Practitioners - Telehealth - Out-of-State Health Care Practitioners
Position: Support
Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
February 16, 2021

Dr. Aliya Jones, Deputy Secretary, Behavioral Health Administration, Maryland Department of Health
Jake Whitaker, Deputy Legislative Officer, Governor's Office

Chair Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Committee:

Senate Bill 568 (SB 568) increases the number of health care practitioners available to deliver telehealth services to patients in Maryland. Licensed out-of-state health care practitioners, who are in good standing with their state licensing authority and adhere to Maryland laws governing practice standards, would be permitted to deliver medical services via telehealth to Maryland patients.

Several Maryland health occupations boards have already or intend to join interstate compacts, including the Board of Physicians, Board of Nursing, and Board of Professional Counselors and Therapists. This bill is aimed at providing Maryland patients with access to out-of-state providers whose respective out-of-state licensing entity has chosen not to participate in an interstate compact. For example, the Board of Physicians joined the Medical Interstate Licensure Compact, but neighboring states like Virginia and Delaware have chosen not to participate. SB 568 will allow Maryland patients to receive services from physicians in states like Virginia and Delaware whose respective licensing authorities are not participating in the Medical Interstate Licensure Compact.

SB 568 will improve patient access to health care practitioners in Maryland communities that are experiencing a health care practitioner shortage. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the demand for behavioral health services via telehealth has only increased. The number of individuals in Maryland who accessed substance use disorder treatment services using telehealth rose from 1,720 in 2019 to 26,084 in 2020.

The COVID-19 pandemic created additional challenges for individuals with substance use disorders and increased the need for expanding access to mental health and substance use disorder treatment services. Overdose deaths in Maryland and across the United States have increased since the beginning of the pandemic. Maryland will continue to need to address these behavioral health challenges after the state of emergency has ended. Increasing the number of available health care practitioners is a critical step in ensuring that Maryland will be poised to serve the mental health and substance use disorder treatment needs of Marylanders moving forward.

Since taking office, Governor Hogan and Lieutenant Governor Rutherford have remained committed to addressing the heroin and opioid epidemic, including expanding access to critical behavioral health and substance use disorder treatment services. SB 568 is another important step in eliminating barriers to behavioral health services in Maryland.

For these reasons, the Administration respectfully requests a favorable report on SB 568.