

Senate Bill 637
Health and Health Insurance – Behavioral Health Services – Expansion
(Behavioral Health System Modernization Act)

Finance Committee
February 23, 2022

Favorable

Catholic Charities of Baltimore supports SB 637 which would modernize Maryland’s public behavioral health system to create the capacity to meet the rising demand for services.

Inspired by the Gospel to love, serve and teach, Catholic Charities provides care and services to improve the lives of Marylanders in need. For almost 100 years, Catholic Charities has operated programs that allow Marylanders to age with dignity, obtain empowering careers, heal from trauma and addiction, secure stable housing and welcome new neighbors. We recognize the need for a robust public behavioral health system in Maryland.

SB 637 includes a variety of reforms and enhancements designed to meet the increasing demand for high quality mental health and substance use care. It will increase comprehensive community-based treatment by expanding Maryland’s network of Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics, improve health outcomes and treatment quality by increasing the use of measurement-based care in behavioral health and primary care settings, strengthen the behavioral health workforce by expanding resources for peers support networks and peer recovery specialists, improve care for children and youth by increasing the availability of home- and community-based wraparound services, and reduce reliance on law enforcement and emergency departments by ensuring stable reimbursement for crisis response services.

Our children’s behavioral health system currently has two programs, Targeted Case Management and 1915(i), that provide high-fidelity wraparound services, the gold standard for treating youth. Despite efforts to create strong programs a decade ago, adjustments to the programs in recent years have left them fledgling. The stringent eligibility criteria results in children being accepted into the programs after the point where they would be effective. Furthermore, the programs are unable to deliver key evidence-based practices because the rates discourage provider participation. SB 637 offers solutions to these short comings.

SB 637 would also strengthen crisis services by requiring Medicaid and other health insurers to reimburse for behavioral health crisis response services. As the operator of the crisis program for youth in Baltimore City, we see the intrinsic value of these services as they prevent traumatic and costly hospitalizations. Medicaid reimbursement for these services would support the ongoing expansion of Maryland’s crisis response capacity.

Additionally, SB 637 expands the use of peer recovery practices. Many people who need treatment, will never receive it because they do not encounter a trustworthy and credible messenger who can speak to them through the lens of their lived experience. Through grant funding we are integrating peer support into our clinics in Baltimore City. Within the first quarter of the grant, the peer coaches met their goals for the year. The overwhelmingly positive response to the introduction of peers both at the initial stages of contact and throughout treatment is an amazing example of this concept at work. We strongly believe Maryland should invest in the expansion of peer support.

Catholic Charities of Baltimore appreciates your consideration, and for the reasons laid out above urges the committee to issue a favorable report for SB 637.

Submitted By: Kevin Keegan, Director of Family Services