



## TESTIMONY TO THE FINANCE COMMITTEE

### **SB0637: Health and Health Insurance- Behavioral Health Services- Expansion (Behavioral Health System Modernization Act)**

**POSITION: Support**

**BY: Nancy Soreng, President**

**DATE: February 23, 2022**

The League of Women Voters supports **Senate Bill 637: Behavioral Health System Modernization Act**, as it will reform and strengthen our behavioral health system to better meet the increasing demand for mental health and substance use services.

The League believes that every U.S. resident should have access to quality, affordable behavioral health care that is integrated with, and achieves parity with, physical health care.

In its *Statement of Position on Health Care*, the League details its support for behavioral health care goals including:

- Access for all people to quality in- and out-patient behavioral health care, including needed medications and supportive services*
- Early and affordable behavioral health diagnosis and treatment for children and youth from early childhood through adolescence*
- Early and appropriate diagnosis and treatment for children and adolescents that is family focused and community-based*

**The stress of the pandemic has especially affected the emotional health and well-being of vulnerable children and families.** Stressors such as isolation from friends, disruption of familiar routines, uncertainty about the future, economic pressure from loss of employment, or trauma from caregiver illness have led to increased feelings of despair and anxiety, and a heightened risk of opioid-related death. There is a particular need now for increased supportive services of all types, including intensive in-home and community-based prevention and early intervention programs, with wraparound services for at-risk children that will reduce disruptions in the home, school, and community.

**The Behavioral Health Modernization Act** will increase the number of Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics, and will fund services provided by peer recovery specialists. **It will also fund crisis stabilization services, centers for treatment of**

**mental health or substance use emergencies, and mobile behavioral health crisis teams that will offer alternatives to law enforcement intervention or hospital Emergency Department treatment – both of which are especially traumatic for children and youths.**

**Senate Bill 637** will expand and provide equitable access to critical home and community-based treatment supports for Marylanders of all ages with behavioral health needs.

**The League urges the committee to give a favorable report to SENATE BILL 637.**