



## **Statement of Maryland Rural Health Association**

To the Health and Government Operations Committee

February 23, 2022

Senate Bill 707- Health Insurance - Provider Panels - Coverage for Nonparticipating Providers

### **Position: SUPPORT**

Chair Kelly, Vice Chair Feldman and members of the Finance Committee, the Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA) wishes to provide this letter of information regarding SB 707- Health Insurance - Provider Panels - Coverage for Nonparticipating Providers.

Rural Maryland represents almost 80 percent of Maryland's land area and 25% of its population. Of Maryland's 24 counties, 18 are considered rural by the state, and with a population of over 1.6 million they differ greatly from the urban areas in the state. For example, networks of providers in rural Maryland are more limited and rural Marylanders frequently must travel farther to access health care services.

MRHA supports efforts to improve access to care for rural Marylanders and provided supportive testimony when this bill was before the committee in 2020. Since that time, workforce shortages and increased prevalence of behavioral health needs in our communities have become even more pronounced. This bill would have a positive impact on the communities we serve by removing purely administrative barriers to mental and behavioral health services.

MRHA's mission is to educate and advocate for the optimal health and wellness of rural communities and their residents. Membership is comprised of health departments, hospitals, community health centers, health professionals, and community members in rural Maryland.

Supporting initiatives that respond to rural health care workforce needs and enhancing access to behavioral health care are among our top advocacy priorities for this year. We believe this will improve suicide prevention, reduce overdose deaths and support parity of coverage for rural Marylanders and urge a favorable review.

*Board President, Jennifer Berkman, 443-783-0480*