

Senate Bill 734 Health and Health Insurance – Primary Care Reform Commission

Finance Committee

February 23, 2022

Position: SUPPORT

The Mental Health Association of Maryland is a nonprofit education and advocacy organization that brings together consumers, families, clinicians, advocates and concerned citizens for unified action in all aspects of mental health and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as behavioral health). We appreciate the opportunity to provide this testimony in support of Senate Bill 734.

SB 734 establishes the Primary Care Reform Commission to review, examine, and make determinations regarding primary care spending across Maryland. The Commission must also make recommendations for ways to improve the quality of and access to primary care services, with special attention to increasing health equity, reducing health disparities, and avoiding increased costs to patients and the health care system.

Studies have shown a marked decrease in primary care spending. Estimates are that only five percent of total healthcare spending goes to primary care, down from 6.5 percent fifteen years ago. This has resulted in a corresponding decline in access to care felt across Maryland. All of Western Maryland, nearly all of the Eastern Shore, and a sizeable portion of Southern Maryland have been designated as Primary Care Shortage areas.

This is a particular concern given efforts to improve the quality of behavioral health treatment delivered in primary care settings. Most individuals experiencing mild to moderate symptoms of anxiety or depression will never seek care from a behavioral health specialist. More often than not, they will turn to their primary care provider for treatment. For this reason, MHAMD and our partners have been working for several years to increase uptake in Maryland of the Collaborative Care Model (CoCM), which is a validated, evidence-based approach for integrating physical and behavioral health care in primary care settings.

We've made much progress, but we still have ways to go. We need to ensure our primary care providers are funded appropriately to deliver CoCM and other treatment modalities that can improve the quality of health care for Maryland residents. **For this reason, MHAMD supports SB 734 and urges a favorable report.**

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