

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

Finance Committee

February 23, 2022

### TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of Senate Bill 637 on behalf of the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP). CLASP is a national, nonpartisan, anti-poverty nonprofit advancing policy solutions to improve the lives of people with low incomes. We develop practical yet visionary strategies for reducing poverty, promoting economic opportunity, and addressing institutional and racial barriers faced by people of color. With over 50 years at the federal, state, and local levels, we're advancing a bold vision for the future rooted in economic security and racial equity.

Through the [Policy Advancing Transformation and Healing \(PATH\) initiative](#), CLASP collaborated with partners to advance systems and policy changes that support well-being for transition-age youth (ages 16-17) and young adults (ages 18-24). Since June of 2019, we have been providing technical assistance to Prince George's County behavioral health and youth system leaders as part of this initiative. Based on our deep work in support of youth and young adult mental health at the local, state, and federal level, we are writing to support the Behavioral Health System Modernization Act.

The need for quality mental health and substance use care has never been higher. At the national level, the office of the [Surgeon General issued an advisory](#) in December of 2021 raising the alarm about the state of youth mental health. CLASP's own research demonstrates that youth and young adults' mental health need [was growing well before the pandemic](#), at least [tripled in 2020](#), and [remained alarmingly high in 2021](#). [More than 3 million young people](#) in July of 2021 reported that they needed mental health support in the last week and did not receive it. Maryland's data mirrors these national trends. Over [45 percent of Maryland youth](#) aged 12-17 who have depression did not receive any mental health care in the last year. Suicides among Marylanders aged 18-25 [increased by 80%](#) from the first half of 2020-2021. Maryland has [48 federally designated mental health professional shortage areas](#), including 16 entire counties.

SB 637 can help. This bill 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.

CLASP is particularly supportive of the provisions of the bill that will strengthen the behavioral health workforce by expanding resources and support for peer support networks and certified peer recovery specialists. Peer support specialists are consistently identified by youth and young adults as preferred providers of behavioral health care because of their shared experience and background. Peer support providers can support young people in a variety of community-based settings where they are comfortable. Nationwide, peer support services are already [Medicaid reimbursable in 39 states](#); making these services Medicaid reimbursable in Maryland was recommended by a legislatively mandated workgroup in 2018.

CLASP is also particularly supportive of the bill's provisions that will reduce reliance on law enforcement and emergency departments by enhancing Maryland's network of crisis calls centers, mobile crisis teams, and crisis stabilization facilities. We are dedicated to the safety and well-being of all youth, but more specifically youth and young adults of color who have mental health conditions. We want to ensure that youth with mental health conditions have access to quality mental health supports and services that do not involve the criminal justice system and law enforcement. [Police-free youth mobile response services](#) that are fully reimbursable for all providers, and free for all of their clients are essential to achieving these goals.

The demand for behavioral health care is at an all-time high. The enhancements in this bill are needed now more than ever. **CLASP urges this committee to pass SB 637.**