



Statement of Maryland Rural Health Association

To the Senate Finance Committee

February 23, 2022

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

Position: SUPPORT

Chair Kelly, Vice Chair Feldman and members of the Finance Committee, the Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA) wishes to provide this testimony in support of SB 637- the Behavioral Health System Modernization Act.

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. Our membership and legislative priorities for this year are included with this testimony.

Rural Maryland has significant challenges and needs regarding access to behavioral health services. Even before the pandemic's tremendous impact on existing health care workforce shortage issues, Maryland has 48 federally designated mental health professional shortage areas,¹ including 16 entire counties.² Demand for these services has only increased over the same timeframe.

SB 637 can help increase access to behavioral health in rural parts of our state. 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.

The demand for behavioral health care is at an all-time high. MRHA **urges this committee to pass SB 637.**

Board President, Jennifer Berkman, 443-783-0480

¹ Health Resources & Services Administration, <https://data.hrsa.gov/tools/shortage-area/hpsa-find>

² Rural Health Information Hub, <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/charts/7?state=MD>