



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

Finance Committee

February 23, 2022

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT

Prince George's County Youth Action Board (PGC YAB) works to create safe environments that help support youth and young adults with long term goals, identify and connect to resources, and create youth led opportunities. PGC YAB was established November 2019 under the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP), a \$3.4 million federally-funded grant through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to end and prevent youth homelessness. We are recognized publicly as a force to drive policy and practice for ending homelessness and identifying resources, particularly around mental health services.

The need for quality mental health and substance use care has never been higher. Over 45 percent of Maryland youth aged 12-17 who have depression did not receive any mental health care in the last year, and suicides among Marylanders aged 18-25 increased by 80% from the first half of 2020-2021.

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.

There is a significant degree of overlap between the populations of those experiencing homelessness and behavioral health conditions. We have partnered with the Core Team of our County's US Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration funded Systems of Care grant for this reason. A financially sustainable crisis system including the appropriate billing codes for mobile crisis and crisis receiving centers is crucial to facilitate the behavioral health of those experiencing homelessness. Often, we are unable to access crisis supports for our youth due to the lack of local capacity resulting in increased number of youth and young adults experiencing depression, anxiety, and suicidality. Finally, improving access to peer support services will not only help our clients, but further the ground-breaking work that we are doing to ensure the age-appropriate voices of those with lived experience will be heard.

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

Thank you for your consideration,

The Prince Georges County Youth Action Board
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