



February 21, 2022

In Support of House Bill 517: *Consumer Health Access Program for Mental Health and Addiction Care Establishment*

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Testimony of:

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Challenges for Social Work
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Dear Chairperson Pendergrass and Committee Members for the House Health and Government Operations Committee:

Please accept the following testimony in support of House Bill 517 on behalf of the University of Maryland School of Social Work's Center for Addiction Research, Education, and Service (CARES). CARES and the University of Maryland School of Social Work (UMSSW) provide a resource rich environment that is ideal for the role of incubator site for the proposed Consumer Health Access Program.

The Center for Addiction Research, Education, and Service (CARES)

The UMSSW, in a joint effort with the School of Pharmacy (SOP), provides leadership to the Center for Addiction Research Education and Services (CARES). CARES was founded in 2017 to address the adverse impact of substance use disorders (SUDs) on individuals, families, communities, and society. Built on a strong foundation of multidisciplinary researchers and resources at the University of Maryland, Baltimore, CARES is tackling issues related to improving service delivery and treatment outcomes for individuals with SUDs. CARES focuses on 4 core aims, including addiction-related workforce development and technical assistance, funding translational research, development of innovative systems and models of care, and policy development, analysis and education. The

development of a Consumer Health Access Program proposed by this legislation is an ideal fit for the core aims of the center. The UMSSW, as the fiscal entity for this legislation, also provides many resources that can support the efforts of CARES as the incubator entity.

The University of Maryland School of Social Work (UMSSW)

The University of Maryland School of Social Work (UMSSW) is ranked nationally among the leading schools of social work. The School has sponsored projects totaling more than \$42 million a year from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the State of Maryland, and local and national foundations and funders. SSW is home to numerous centers and programs, including the Family-Informed Trauma Treatment Center, the National Child Welfare Workforce Institute, the Maryland Longitudinal Data System Center, the Ruth H. Young Center for Families and Children, and the Institute for Innovation and Implementation, which hosts the SAMHSA-funded National Technical Assistance (TA) Center for Children's Behavioral Health, providing technical assistance to all 50 states. The SSW contracts with more than 20 states to provide training and evaluation services for wraparound services to families experiencing behavioral health challenges. In addition, the UMSSW is a national leader in developing integrated health and behavioral health services that address substance use disorders. With funding from NIDA, SAMHSA, HRSA, and the State of Maryland, the School has an active portfolio of research projects focused on substance use disorder and other addictive behaviors and a large training program that partners with federally qualified health centers, primary care programs, community organizations, and peer recovery programs. The School of Social Work prepares masters, and doctoral students and well as post-doctoral fellows to work within integrated behavioral health and substance abuse treatment settings.

The Need for Improved Consumer Health Access

Innovative models of care, such as Consumer Health Access Programs, are needed that can help to reduce the many barriers that individuals face when trying to access and maintain treatment. Unfortunately, the majority of individuals in need of mental health and/or SUD treatment do not access treatment or do not receive adequate treatment. Many of the reasons individuals do not receive adequate treatment have to do with a lack of understanding of health plans and available providers, lack of in-network providers, requirements for prior authorization to treatment, and continuing care treatment denials. A strong consumer network, including in-person, direct assistance is critical for helping individuals navigate the treatment system to ensure optimal treatment access and coverage.

As the incubator site for the pilot legislation, UMSSW CARES will convene a highly qualified and diverse advisory group that will be charged with implementing a competitive application process in year 1 to identify the Consumer Health Access Program's hub entity. This hub entity will serve as a single point of contact for consumer assistance and will coordinate with non-governmental community-based organizations in Maryland's 8 connector entity regions that enroll individuals in public and private health insurance. The incubator site will also support the hub in selecting the 8 community-based organizations ("spokes") and will help build an infrastructure for the hub to collect and analyze data on the impact of the Consumer Health Access Program.

Legislation is needed to support the implementation of this 3 year pilot Consumer Health Access Program. This program will be a tremendous asset to Maryland consumers by helping them to navigate the many health insurance barriers impacting receipt of mental health and SUD treatment. To the extent

that the program is effective, it can serve as a model to other states on the optimal structure and organization of the hub and spoke model. UMSSW CARES is excited for the opportunity to facilitate the implementation of a strong Consumer Health Access Program that has great potential for improving the lives of many Marylanders in need of mental health or SUD treatment.

Please let us know if we can provide any further information on how UMSSW CARES will support the Consumer Health Access Program.

Sincerely,



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