



February 23, 2022

House Health and Government Operations Committee
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT

HB 517 Consumer Health Access Program for Mental Health and Addiction Care- Establishment

Behavioral Health System Baltimore (BHSB) is a nonprofit organization that serves as the local behavioral health authority (LBHA) for Baltimore City. BHSB works to increase access to a full range of quality behavioral health (mental health and substance use disorder) services and advocates for innovative approaches to prevention, early intervention, treatment and recovery for individuals, families, and communities. **Baltimore City represents nearly 35 percent of the public behavioral health system in Maryland, serving over 77,000 people with mental illness and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as “behavioral health”) annually.**

Behavioral Health System Baltimore supports HB 517- Consumer Health Access Program for Mental Health and Addiction Care-Establishment. This bill establishes the Consumer Health Access Program for Mental Health and Addiction Care to assist State residents in accessing mental health and substance use disorder services under public and private health insurance.

The COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to an unprecedented need for mental health and substance use disorder treatment. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 40 percent of people report at least one adverse mental or behavioral health condition, including symptoms of anxiety disorder or depressive disorder, symptoms of a trauma- and stressor-related disorder (TSRD) related to the pandemic, and having started or increased substance use to cope with stress or emotions related to COVID-19.¹ BHSB supports HB 517 because with the increase in demand for services the Consumer Health Access Program will help improve access to life-saving mental health and substance use disorder treatment.

The Consumer Health Access Program (CHAP) will deliver assistance through a central entity and eight community-based organizations serving as “spokes” in regions across Maryland. It will be staffed by individuals with lived experiences and provide equity-centered outreach, education, and assistance to help Marylanders understand their rights and get the care they need. They will identify insurance gaps, barriers, and discriminatory standards that apply to many people and work to fix them.

The creation of a one-stop shop that will help not only provide resources for treatment and support services but also assist consumers and providers in resolving issues related to health plan enrollment and service coverage, provide consumers with representation in filing complaints, and identify gaps in coverage can help remove many of the barriers that people face when trying to access critical mental health and substance use disorder services.

The Consumer Health Access Program will provide much needed assistance at a time where demand for services continues to increase. As such, **BHSB asks the Senate Finance Committee to support HB 517.**

¹ Czeisler MÉ , Lane RI, Petrosky E, et al. Mental Health, Substance Use, and Suicidal Ideation During the COVID-19 Pandemic — United States, June 24–30, 2020. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep* 2020;69:1049–1057.
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