



February 20, 2022

The Honorable Shane E. Pendergrass
House Health & Government Operations Committee
House Office Building – Room 241
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Support – HB Bill 517: Consumer Health Access Program for Mental Health and Addiction Care – Establishment

Dear Chairman Pendergrass and Honorable Members of the Committee:

The Maryland Psychiatric Society (MPS) and the Washington Psychiatric Society (WPS) are state medical organizations whose physician members specialize in diagnosing, treating, and preventing mental illnesses, including substance use disorders. Formed more than sixty-five years ago to support the needs of psychiatrists and their patients, both organizations work to ensure available, accessible, and comprehensive quality mental health resources for all Maryland citizens; and strive through public education to dispel the stigma and discrimination of those suffering from a mental illness. As the district branches of the American Psychiatric Association covering the state of Maryland, MPS and WPS represent over 1000 psychiatrists and physicians currently in psychiatric training.

MPS/WPS support House Bill 517: Consumer Health Access Program for Mental Health and Addiction Care – Establishment (HB 517) as it pulls together the three most insightful quantitative metrics around parity: geographical travel distance, appointment wait time, and provider-patient ratio for people who need mental health or substance use disorder treatment. HB 517 then establishes an ombudsman program, the Consumer Health Access Program for Mental Health and Addiction Care, to assist State residents in accessing behavioral health services under public and private health insurance and address insurance-related barriers to behavioral health services. Finally, by helping Maryland to eliminate network gaps for providers of mental health and substance use disorder (SUD) services, this bill would also bring Maryland into compliance with federal law, which requires network adequacy and transparency standards.¹

A 2019 Milliman report highlighted the significant network gaps for Marylanders seeking mental health and SUD treatment². For example, the Milliman report examined 2017 statistics

¹ [45 CFR § 156.230 - Network Adequacy Standards](#)

² Addiction and Mental Health vs. Physical Health: Widening Disparities in Network Use and Provider Reimbursement (Nov. 19, 2019), found at <https://www.milliman.com/en/insight/addiction-and-mental-health-vs-physical-health-widening-disparities-in-network-use-and-p>



**Washington
Psychiatric Society**

around Maryland's out of network (OON) utilization for mental health and SUD treatment and noted the following:

- Marylanders' out-of-network (OON) utilization for mental health and SUD office visits exceeded OON primary care office visits by 10%;
- For outpatient facility services, Marylander's OON utilization for mental health and SUD services exceeded medical/surgical services by 3.66%; and
- Marylanders' OON utilization for mental health and SUD services exceeded medical/surgical services by 9.35% for inpatient facility services.

Unfortunately, Maryland ranked the 4th worst state in the nation for OON utilization for MH and SUD office visits. Thus, HB 517 is a meaningful step in correcting the gaps in network adequacy in the state.

MPS/WPS, therefore, as this committee for a favorable report. If you have any questions with regard to this testimony, please feel free to contact Thomas Tompsett Jr. at tommy.tompsett@mdlobbyist.com.

Respectfully submitted,
The Maryland Psychiatric Society and the Washington Psychiatric Society
Legislative Action Committee