

MedChi

The Maryland State Medical Society

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TO: The Honorable Shane E. Pendergrass, Chair
Members, House Health and Government Operations Committee
The Honorable Robbyn Lewis

FROM: Pamela Metz Kasemeyer
J. Steven Wise
Danna L. Kauffman
Christine K. Krone

DATE: February 23, 2022

RE: **SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENT** – House Bill 517 – *Consumer Health Access Program for Mental Health and Addiction Care – Establishment*

The Maryland State Medical Society (MedChi), the largest physician organization in Maryland, **supports with amendment** House Bill 517.

House Bill 517 establishes a 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 addresses insurance-related barriers to behavioral health services. It creates a hub and spoke approach to establishing essentially ombudsman programs across the State to assist individuals and providers with navigation of insurance issues relative to behavioral health services. The Program will be administered by the University of Maryland Baltimore School of Social Work Center for Addiction Research, Education, and Services and a hub entity. The bill also establishes a Consumer Health Access Program for Mental Health and Addiction Care Fund to provide funding for the development and administration of the program with a mandated appropriation of \$1 million for FY 2024 through 2026.

Compliance challenges related to mental health parity, adequate provider networks for behavioral health services, and other administrative barriers to accessing needed mental health and addiction care have been a topic of significant interest by the General Assembly for several years. This bill would create a framework to assist residents with navigating these challenges.

While MedChi fully supports the objectives and proposed framework for this initiative, it respectfully requests one amendment which they believe is unnecessary to achieve the bills objectives and may create an impression of assistance that is in fact ineffective. Section 13-4408 (page 11, lines 5-13) requires the program to publish a notice concerning the services offered, which is to be posted in a conspicuous location and included in written material by each employer that provides health insurance as

well as mental health and substance abuse providers. MedChi assumes the intended objective is public education, however, posting information in offices rarely can be done in a manner that accomplishes that objective. Accessibility to all employees or patients is essentially impossible and there is no assurance employees or patients would even choose to review the posted material. MedChi respectfully requests deletion of these requirements as there are other methods of consumer awareness and education regarding the program that would be more effective. With its amendment noted, MedChi requests a favorable report.

For more information call:

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