



February 17, 2022

**House Ways and Means Committee
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT**

HB 513- Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Program- Established

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) 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 513- Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Program-Established. This bill establishes an Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (ECMH) Program within the State Department of Education’s Division of Early Childhood Development, that is responsible for referring children and families in need of intensive mental or behavioral health services to appropriate clinics or programs; training, coaching, and mentoring teachers and caregivers to address challenging behaviors; building partnerships with community resources; and working to ensure children have stable, quality child care programs. It also includes an annual appropriation for the fund.

BHSB supports HB 513 because ECMH Consultation Programs provide families and adults who work with infants and young children the capacity to strengthen and support the health social and emotional development of children. This program is currently administered in Baltimore City and on a county or regional basis across the state and has struggled to remain steadily funded.

Investments in programs, like the ECMH Consultation Program, support infant and early childhood brain development. They have impacts on preventing the achievement gap, improving health outcomes, and boosting lifetime earnings. These programs also provide an overall return on investment through better outcomes in education, health, sociability, economic productivity, and reduced crime.¹

In addition, expansion of the ECMH Consultation Program is a critical step in Maryland’s response to mitigating the negative impacts of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). ACEs, or Adverse Childhood Experiences, are a category of early life traumas which negatively impact long-term health, prosperity, and social mobility outcomes. Recent data collected in Maryland found that more than 40 percent of Maryland children have at least one ACE-15.4 percent have two or more.² While ACEs and trauma can have a profound impact on a child’s health and well-being lasting into adulthood it is not a life sentence. Preventative programs like in HB 513 are key to stemming the tide. As such, **BHSB urges the House Ways and Means Committee to support HB 513.**

¹ Heckman, J. (2017). “4 Big Benefits of Investing in Early Childhood Development.”

<https://heckmanequation.org/resource/4-big-benefits-of-investing-in-early-childhood-development/>

² Baltimore Sun. More than 40 percent of Maryland children experience traumatic events. October 19, 2017.