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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**Testimony in Support of
House Bill 766: Education Funding - Residential Treatment Centers
February 24, 2022**

Members of the Ways and Means Committee, it is my pleasure to come before you and offer testimony in favor of **House Bill 766: Education Funding - Residential Treatment Centers**. If enacted, this bill would provide greater access to treatment for youth with high intensity psychiatric and behavioral health conditions by authorizing local mental health agencies to approve funding for educational costs incurred at residential treatment centers (RTC's).

Under our current system, school counselors have disproportionate influence over the decision to place a child in an RTC through an Individual Education Plan (IEP). If an IEP does not specify the need for placement, in order to obtain approval and funding, families must go through a very complex, potentially costly Voluntary Placement Agreement (VPA) process. This process entails relinquishing custody of one's child as well as a consequential child support payment of up to \$2,000 per month to maintain the child's placement.

This bill authorizes Core Service Agencies and local Behavioral Health Authorities to approve funding for the educational costs of an RTC, and establishes the Maryland Department of Health as the source of funding rather than the Department of Human Services. In doing this, families will no longer require the current VPA process and applications for RTCs will be sent directly through the Core Service Agencies and Local Behavioral Health Authorities regardless of prior qualifications.

This redirect is a crucial step to ensure that access to necessary mental health treatment is not dependent on a school's preference for the child's placement nor the cost of treatment, but instead allows specialists to decide the needs of a student and allows the proper state resources to cover as much of the cost as possible.

This legislation will allow those suffering debilitating psychiatric conditions to have access to treatment and education at RTCs.

I urge a favorable report on **House Bill 766**. Thank you.