



Maryland Community Health System

Committee: House Ways and Means Committee

Bill Number: House Bill 618 – Maryland Parental Rights Act

Hearing Date: February 22, 2022

Position: Oppose

The Maryland Community Health System (MCHS) opposes *House Bill 618 – Maryland Parental Rights Act*. The bill would allow practitioners or owners of a health care facility to be charged with a criminal misdemeanor if violating Maryland’s minor consent laws.

MCHS is a network of federally qualified health centers who are focused on providing somatic, behavioral, and dental services to underserved communities, including adolescents. Maryland law allows minors to consent to services in certain circumstances including for: behavioral health, birth control, and substance use disorder treatment. In addition, minors can consent to a broader array of services if they are “unaccompanied” which is usually applicable for youth who are homeless without parents.

MCHS believes there are no other criminal penalties for violations of consent provisions, so this bill appears to be designed to have a chilling effect on practitioners’ willingness to provide services to minors under Maryland’s existing minor consent provisions. We are deeply concerned that this bill will put Maryland’s youth in a precarious position as fewer practitioners would be willing to provide needed care. As a state, we have been striving to decrease rates of unintended pregnancies, mental health illness, and substance use among youth. This bill would take us backwards.

We would also note that this bill appears to create the possibility that the boards of community health centers or any other health facility could be subject to criminal penalties. The bill seems to require both the individual practitioner and the facility to obtain parental consent, which implies two separate consents need to be obtained.

We ask for a unfavorable report. If we can provide any further information, please contact Scott Tiffin at stiffin@policypartners.net.