

February 5, 2023

The Honorable Melony Griffith
Finance Committee
3 East - Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Support with Amendments – SB 201: Maryland Medical Assistance and Children's Health Insurance Programs - School-Based Behavioral Health Services - Reimbursement

Dear Chair Griffith 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 with amendments Senate Bill 201: Maryland Medical Assistance and Children's Health Insurance Programs - School-Based Behavioral Health Services – Reimbursement (SB 201). Although MPS/WPS fully appreciate the need to increase school mental health services, we are concerned that SB 201 would create confusion in providing mental healthcare for many students.

Currently, in many schools around the state, community providers are sought to deliver school-based mental health services within schools for students, particularly for students who do not receive therapy services as a requirement of an Individualized Education Program (IEP). Well-established outpatient mental health organizations have been providing these services successfully for years and thus have been able to offer seamless mental healthcare to students while in school and after they go home. These services include individual psychotherapy, which school-employed clinicians could provide, and psychiatric care for medication management that is only available via outpatient providers. In addition, other therapy modalities, like family therapy, or adjunctive services, like psychiatric rehabilitation programs, which are critical to the comprehensive care of youth, are typically available via outpatient providers only.

It is easy to imagine a well-intentioned, school-employed clinician beginning therapy with a student only to discover that they need these additional services that would not be available. It is also important to note that behavioral and emotional disorders do not pause upon exiting the school doors. Youth mental health providers need to be able to respond to the needs of youth in school and out. Finally, the confusion created by allowing both school-employed clinicians

and outpatient school-based clinicians to treat and seek reimbursement would be considerable. Enrollment in care with one clinician often prevents enrollment in care with another, and worse yet, the possibility of multiple clinicians involved in the care of one youth unknowingly could be detrimental.

As a result, we are offering our support of the bill but with the amendment that ***reimbursement for such services is restricted to schools that are unable to find a community outpatient provider to deliver the services***. This amendment would limit the problems identified above for most schools while still making reimbursable care available for schools that do not have access to a community provider to deliver services.

Amendment 1

On page 2, in line 3, after “PROGRAM” insert “AND WHO ARE UNABLE TO FIND A COMMUNITY OUTPATIENT PROVIDER TO DELIVER THE SERVICES”.

With the above amendment adopted, MPS/WPS ask this committee for a favorable report on SB 201. If you have any questions concerning 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