



Wes Moore, Governor · Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor · Laura Herrera Scott, M.D., M.P.H., Secretary

February 21, 2023

The Honorable Joseline Pena-Melnyk  
Chair, Health and Government Operations Committee  
Room 241, House Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401-1991

**RE: HB 418 Mental Health - Workforce Development - Fund Established - Letter of Support**

Dear Chair Peña-Melnyk and Committee Members:

The Maryland Department of Health (MDH) respectfully submits this letter of support for House Bill (HB) 418 – Mental Health - Workforce Development - Fund Established. HB 418 establishes a non-lapsing fund to provide reimbursement for costs associated with educating, training, certifying, recruiting, placing, and retaining behavioral health professionals and paraprofessionals. Additionally, HB 418 will require the Maryland Health Care Commission (MHCC), in coordination with the Behavioral Health Administration (BHA), the Maryland Higher Education Commission, and other interested stakeholders, to conduct a comprehensive behavioral health workforce needs assessment.

Behavioral health conditions, both mental health and substance use disorders, impact millions of people in the United States.<sup>1</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic and continuing opioid crisis have had a considerable impact on the demand for behavioral health services and there is a challenge in recruiting and maintaining behavioral health workers.<sup>2</sup> Establishing measures to address the workforce shortage is important in ensuring providers network adequacy to address the behavioral health needs of Marylanders.

MDH supports the intent of HB 418 to complete a workforce needs assessment to determine the immediate, intermediate, and long-term need and capacity of the behavioral health workforce. However, MDH notes that in recent years, efforts have been completed to gather this information which include, but are not limited to:

- Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) [Behavioral Health Workforce Projections, 2020-2035](#)<sup>3</sup>
- [BHA 2019 Workforce Survey](#)<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Key Substance Use and Mental Health Indicators in the United States: Results from the 2020 National Survey on Drug Use and Health. (SAMSHA)

<https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/reports/rpt35325/NSDUHFRRPDFWHTMLFiles2020/2020NSDUHFRR1PDFW102121.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> United States Government Accountability Office. Behavioral Health: Available Workforce Information and Federal Actions to Help Recruit and Retain Providers. GAO-23-105250. October 27, 2022. <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-23-105250>

<sup>3</sup> United States Department of Health and Human Services. Health Resources and Services Administration. October 2022. <https://bhwr.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/bureau-health-workforce/Behavioral-Health-Workforce-Projections-Factsheet.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Maryland Department of Health. Behavioral Health Administration. Maryland Behavioral Health Workforce Survey – Results Summary. September 24, 2020. <https://health.maryland.gov/bha/Documents/Workforce%20Survey%20Summary%20distribution9.4.20%20%282%29%20%282%29.pdf>

Furthermore, similar work is taking place under the direction of the Maryland Higher Education Commission and the Maryland Department of Labor. To avoid duplicative work, MDH recommends collaborating with these agencies toward developing an unified approach in addressing workforce shortages to include behavioral health professionals.

Lastly, MDH appreciates the General Assembly's interest in establishing a fund to provide reimbursement for costs associated with educating, training, certifying, recruiting, placing, and retaining behavioral health professionals and paraprofessionals. MDH supports the language in HB 418 establishing flexibility of the money appropriated to the funds and will work closely with the Maryland Department of Budget and Management to determine the level of funding that is sufficient to carry out the intent of this legislation.

If you have any questions, please contact Megan Peters, Acting Director of Governmental Affairs, at [megan.peters@maryland.gov](mailto:megan.peters@maryland.gov) or (410) 260-3190.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Laura Herrera Scott". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Laura" being the most prominent part.

Laura Herrera Scott, M.D., M.P.H.  
Acting Secretary