



Kennedy Krieger Institute

DATE: February 21, 2023 **COMMITTEE:** House Health and Government Operations
BILL NO: House Bill 418
BILL TITLE: Mental Health - Workforce Development - Fund Established
POSITION: Support

Kennedy Krieger Institute supports House Bill 418 - Mental Health - Workforce Development - Fund Established

Bill Summary:

HB418 would establish the Behavioral Health Workforce Investment Fund to provide reimbursement for costs associated with educating, training, certifying, recruiting, placing, and retaining behavioral health professionals and paraprofessionals; providing that money expended from the Fund is supplemental and not intended to supplant funding that would otherwise be appropriated; and requiring the Maryland Health Care Commission to conduct a comprehensive behavioral health workforce needs assessment on or before December 1, 2023.

Background:

Kennedy Krieger Institute is dedicated to improving the lives of children and young adults with developmental, behavioral, cognitive, and physical challenges. Kennedy Krieger's services include inpatient, outpatient, school-based, and community-based programs. Over 27,000 individuals receive services annually at Kennedy Krieger.

The vision for the newly established Office for Health Equity Inclusion and Diversity (O-HEID) at Kennedy Krieger Institute is to promote the health and well-being of those who work and receive training and services at Kennedy Krieger Institute. The O-HEID uses evidence, culturally relevant, and equity-based approaches that assures diversity and inclusion. The O-HEID is working to establish collaboration, data, and metrics to address remediable disparities within our patient populations, policies, and practices.

Rationale:

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, there was already an ongoing behavioral health crisis in children. The pandemic has significantly exacerbated that crisis. It is estimated that 1 out of 5 children has a mental, emotional, or behavioral health disorder,¹ though only about 20 percent of these children receive the mental health services they need.² For children of color, children with disabilities, LGBTQ+ children, and children living in households with incomes at or below the poverty level, the crisis is particularly intense as they bear an undue burden of poor mental health outcomes. Such disparities are, in large part, due to scarcity of trained culturally responsive and trauma-informed mental health providers, socioeconomic disadvantage, racism, and/or immigration status, amongst other factors.³ After nearly 3 years, the negative effects of the pandemic including loss and grief, isolation, and academic challenges have resulted in long-lasting and increasing rates of depression, suicidal ideation, and anxiety amongst youth.⁴ This increase in frequency and chronicity is concerning for multiple reasons, including the fact that psychiatric conditions that start in childhood increase the risk for poorer health outcomes later in life.⁵

The behavioral health needs of Marylanders are strongly outpacing the behavioral health workforce. There is a nationwide shortage of behavioral health professionals,⁶ which means that children and youth are suffering from lack of identification and treatment of mental health concerns. Racial, ethnic, and language diversity is lacking in the mental health field in which, nationwide, less than 10% of psychologists, psychiatric nurse practitioners, and psychiatrists are Black or Hispanic/Latino. Incentivization to recruit and retain a diverse and talented mental health workforce is especially critical in Maryland, the most diverse east coast state.⁷⁻¹⁰ As such, investing in the behavioral health workforce is a critical necessity because without sustained efforts to recruit

and retain well-qualified behavioral health professionals, there will be a shortage of workers which will negatively impact the health of Marylanders. Moreover, further investment in the behavioral health workforce is a critical step to ensuring that children in Maryland have access to much needed services and would send a clear message to Marylanders that mental health matters.

Kennedy Krieger Institute requests a favorable report on House Bill 418.

References

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**Contact information: Emily Arneson, AVP Government Affairs – 443.631.2188 or arneson@kennedykrieger.org
707 North Broadway Baltimore, Maryland 21205**