



Maryland  
Hospital Association

February 17, 2023

To: The Honorable [Joseline Peña-Melnyk](#), Chair, [House Health & Government Operations Committee](#)

Re: [Letter of Support](#)- [House Bill](#) 418- Mental Health – Workforce Development – Fund Established

Dear Chair [Peña-Melnyk](#):

On behalf of the Maryland Hospital Association's (MHA) 60 member hospitals and health systems, we appreciate the opportunity to comment on House Bill 418.

Maryland, like much of the nation, is experiencing a behavioral health crisis. Behavioral health needs worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic, and a historic health care workforce shortage limits availability of care. Seventeen of Maryland's 24 jurisdictions fall below the national average ratio of 350 mental health providers for every person.

Maryland patients frequently access behavioral health services for the first time when in crisis during visits to hospital emergency departments. When patients have access to behavioral health professionals and services, they can receive care at the onset of behavioral health conditions and stay out of crisis.

HB 418 helps address the behavioral health workforce crisis—and improve health care for Marylanders—by establishing a *Behavioral Health Workforce Investment Fund* to reimburse for costs associated with educating, training, certifying, recruiting, placing, and retaining behavioral health professionals and paraprofessionals. Funding is left discretionary initially to allow for a required workforce needs assessment that will (1) determine the immediate, intermediate, and long-term unmet need and capacity of Maryland's behavioral health workforce; (2) calculate the total number of behavioral health professionals and paraprofessionals needed over the next five years, 10 years, and 20 years; and (3) make very specific findings and recommendations regarding the types of workforce assistance programs and funding necessary to meet the need across all sectors of the behavioral health workforce.

This bill will improve the availability of behavioral health care professionals and services, improve outcomes, keep people out of crisis, and decrease unnecessary emergency department visits.

For these reasons, we request a *favorable* report on HB 418.

For more information, please contact:  
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