



Maryland Addiction Directors Council

House Bill 418 Mental Health – Workforce Development – Fund Established

House Health and Government Operations Committee

February 21, 2023

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT

Maryland Addiction Directors Council (MADC) represents SUD and Dual Recovery outpatient and residential providers in Maryland. MADC members provide over 1,200 residential beds across the State and advocate for quality SUD and Dual Recovery outpatient and residential treatment.

Maryland is amid a behavioral health workforce crisis. Federal data¹ released just this month found that Maryland has **63 federally designated mental health professional shortage areas (HPSAs)**², including 11 entire counties. These shortage areas, in which less than 20% of residents are getting their mental health needs met, impact over 1.7 million Marylanders. Another indicator found that **17 of Maryland's 24 jurisdictions come in below the national average (350:1)** in terms of population to mental health providers, with a number that are considerably lower.³

This is unsustainable. There are simply not enough behavioral health professionals to meet the mental health and substance use needs of all Marylanders.

There are many positive ideas and strategies for growing the behavioral health workforce – stipends and scholarships, enhanced training programs, loan repayment, paid internships, etc. The question, however, is how much funding do we put into these different initiatives and how do we target efforts to ensure we are properly resourcing **all** behavioral health professionals and paraprofessionals? **HB 418 is the answer.**

The bill establishes 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

¹ <https://data.hrsa.gov/Default/GenerateHPSAQuarterlyReport>

² A HPSA is a geographic area, population group, or health care facility that has been designated by the US Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) as having a shortage of health professionals in one of three categories – primary care, dental health, and mental health

³ <https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/explore-health-rankings/maryland?year=2022&measure=Mental+Health+Providers&tab=1>

next 5 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.

With the fentanyl epidemic, SUD counselors, peer specialists and licensed social workers will be needed in growing and continued demand. Maryland must plan to provide the needed workforce assistance to field these critical staff for behavioral healthcare treatment.

This bill will expand and stabilize Maryland's behavioral health workforce. **For these reasons, Maryland Addiction Directors Council urges this committee to pass HB 418.**