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February 21, 2023

COMMITTEE: House Health and Government Operations Committee

BILL: HB 418 – Mental Health – Workforce Development – Fund
Established

POSITION: Support

The Horizon Foundation is Howard County's community health foundation and the largest independent health philanthropy in the state of Maryland. We lead community change so everyone in Howard County can live a longer, better life.

**The Foundation is pleased to support HB 418 – Mental Health –
Workforce Development – Fund Established.**

HB 418 establishes a statewide fund to assist with costs associated with educating, training, certifying, recruiting, placing, and retaining behavioral health professionals and paraprofessionals. The bill would also require the Maryland Health Care Commission to conduct a comprehensive behavioral health workforce needs assessment.

Maryland's health care work force is experiencing unprecedented levels of fatigue and attrition, driven by the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has made worse an existing lack of mental and behavioral health workers. According to the United States Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), Maryland has 63 federally designated mental health professional shortage areas (HPSAs), 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. The 2023 County Health Rankings found that 17 of Maryland's 24 jurisdictions come in below the national average (350:1) in terms of population to mental health providers. Howard County, a relatively prosperous and healthy jurisdiction, has a still too high 300:1 resident to mental health provider ratio.

Mental health has been one of the Horizon Foundation's top priorities in recent years. Together with our many community partners and grantees, we advocated for enhanced mental health supports for students during the school day. As a result, mental health counselors will soon be available in every public school in Howard County.

The Horizon Foundation has also worked to increase access to mental health crisis services through our work with the Greater Baltimore Regional Integrated Crisis System (GRBICS), and helped support the operation of Sheppard Pratt’s new urgent care behavioral health clinic in Elkridge. Regardless of our best efforts to link community members to mental and behavioral health care, we need to attract and retain more qualified professionals capable of delivering said care.

HB 418 will broaden the mental and behavioral health workforce so all Marylanders can access the care they need. For this reason, the Horizon Foundation **SUPPORTS HB 418** and urges a **FAVORABLE** report.

Thank you for your consideration.