

House Bill 418 Mental Health – Workforce Development – Fund Establishes
House Health and Government Operations Committee
February 21, 2023
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT

The Mental Health Association of Maryland is a nonprofit education and advocacy organization that brings together consumers, families, clinicians, advocates and concerned citizens for unified action in all aspects of mental health and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as behavioral health). We appreciate the opportunity to provide this testimony in support of House Bill 418.

Maryland is in the midst of 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 And in a 2021 issue brief⁴, the Community Behavioral Health Association of Maryland found **staff vacancies** in 78% of child outpatient mental health centers, 83% of psychiatric rehabilitation programs for minors, and 50% of youth targeted case management programs.

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

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>

⁴ <http://mdcbh.org/files/manual/169/Child%20Utilization%20-%20Sept%202021.pdf>

the total number of behavioral health professionals and paraprofessionals needed over the 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.

This bill will stabilize and expand Maryland's behavioral health workforce. **For these reasons, MHAMD supports HB 418 and urges a favorable report.**