



House Bill 418 Mental Health – Workforce Development – Fund Established

House Health and Government Operations Committee

February 21, 2023

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT

Totally Linking Care MD (TLC-MD) is a nonprofit coalition of 6 hospitals that connects healthcare providers and programs with residents in Southern Maryland (Calvert County, Charles County, Prince George’s County, and St. Mary’s County). We believe that everyone deserves access to quality healthcare.

We build innovative health programs through grant funding and sustain them through public/private partnerships. Our goal is to simplify how residents access healthcare, one program at a time, to help them become the healthiest version of themselves. We do this by breaking down barriers to health care services and building bridges between hospitals, healthcare professionals, faith-based organizations, and, most importantly, the residents of our community.

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 is considerably lower.

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

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



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 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.

House Bill 418 Mental Health – Workforce Development and the current workforce crisis for behavioral health workers in Maryland are very important to TLC-MD and the residents that we serve. As TLC-MD works to implement the first Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA) national guidelines full crisis continuum system in Prince Georges County, we will need this level of support to hire qualified and passionate staff. Proactive sustainability measures need to be introduced, such as HB 418. With the introduction of 988 and the evolution of thinking nationwide around

This bill will expand and stabilize Maryland's behavioral health workforce. **For these reasons, Totally Linking Care Maryland (TLC-MD) urges this committee to pass HB 418.**

Sincerely,

Margaret Fowler

Margaret Fowler
Executive Director