

CITY OF BALTIMORE

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Councilwoman Phylcia R. L. Porter

District 10

MEMBER:

Public Safety and Government Operations
Education, Workforce, and Youth
Health, Environment, and Technology

March 11, 2024

The Finance Committee
3 East
Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Testimony Supporting SB0888 Local Behavioral Health Authorities and Oversight of Behavioral Health Program

Re: Support for SB0888 Health - Local Behavioral Health Authorities and Oversight of Behavioral Health Program

Dear Chair Beidle and Honorable Members of the Committee

I am writing in support of SB0888 Health - Local Behavioral Health Authorities and Oversight of Behavioral Health Programs. Behavioral health plays a critical role in the overall vitality of the communities that I serve. Behavioral health, encompassing mental and emotional well-being, influences our ability to navigate life's challenges, maintain positive relationships, and contribute meaningfully to our society. To address and support the diverse needs of our community members, we must recognize the indispensable role played by behavioral health facilities. Yet as a public health practitioner, I believe that it is equally important that we think critically about the quality of the mental health services that are available to residents. As we strive to invest in communities that promote the well-being of all its members, it is essential to recognize the pivotal role that oversight plays in ensuring the delivery of high-quality services and outcomes.

The major issue within the current landscape of behavioral and mental health facilities is the lack of consistent oversight of secondary quality of life issues that impact community members. From a regulatory standpoint, while clinics are following the law, the current provisions have led to a variation in service quality and accountability. Reports of substandard practices and inconsistent intervention strategies underscore the need for a unified approach to safeguard the interests of individuals with substance use disorder (SUD). From a community perspective, rather than focusing on long-term recovery, mental health clinics serve as a continuous invitation to people who do not live within these communities and have become a breeding ground for crime, drug use, and drug exchange. With over 20 mental health clinics in South Baltimore, the over-saturation has left residents skeptical of their utility in the community.

SB0888 stands to address the need for stronger enforcement mechanisms on behalf of local behavioral health authorities and calls for increased community input in decision making. This

bill also highlights that by implementing rigorous standards and monitoring protocols, such oversight mechanisms will help prevent adverse events and protect some of our most vulnerable populations.

The recommendations outlined in SB0888 align with the goals of the community and move toward more equitable oversight and flexibility. This level of reform also has the power to reshape the public discourse around behavioral health clinics, how they are situated within our communities, and better establish behavioral health authorities as an essential part of our public health infrastructure.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Phylcia Porter". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized initial "P" and "P" at the end.

Councilwoman Phylcia Porter, MPH, MSL - District 10
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