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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Tuesday, March 12, 2024

Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 888 Health - Local Behavioral Health Authorities and Oversight of Behavioral Health Programs

Honorable Members of the Senate Finance Committee,

I am writing to express my strong support for Senate Bill 888, which authorizes local behavioral health authorities (LBHAs) to hire their own inspectors to monitor the quality and safety of behavioral health programs. This bill represents a crucial step towards ensuring the well-being of individuals receiving behavioral health services in our communities.

One of the most significant aspects of SB 888 is its provision for LBHAs to employ inspectors dedicated to overseeing behavioral health programs. These inspectors, in addition to any employed by the Maryland Department of Health (MDH), will play a vital role in ensuring that behavioral health facilities adhere to the highest standards of care. By having inspectors specifically focused on behavioral health, we can better address the unique challenges and complexities present in these settings.

Furthermore, SB 888 mandates that LBHAs track complaints against behavioral health programs and forward relevant information to the appropriate health occupations board. This accountability measure ensures that any concerns or grievances raised by individuals receiving care or their families are promptly addressed, contributing to improved transparency and responsiveness within the behavioral health system.

Additionally, the requirement for behavioral health programs to seek community input when forming agreements with LBHAs underscores the importance of involving stakeholders in decision-making processes. Community involvement fosters collaboration and ensures that the needs and perspectives of those served by behavioral health programs are adequately considered.

The provision allowing the Behavioral Health Administration (BHA) to adopt regulations to implement the bill further strengthens its effectiveness. Clear guidelines and standards set forth

by the BHA will help streamline the implementation process and provide clarity for LBHAs and behavioral health programs alike.

Finally, the requirement for BHA to report annually to the General Assembly on the implementation of SB 888 demonstrates a commitment to accountability and ongoing evaluation of its impact. These reports will enable legislators to assess the effectiveness of the bill's provisions and make informed decisions about future policies and resource allocation in the realm of behavioral health.

In conclusion, Senate Bill 888 represents a significant opportunity to enhance the quality and safety of behavioral health services in our state. By empowering LBHAs to hire inspectors, track complaints, and engage with communities, this bill addresses critical gaps in oversight and accountability within the behavioral health system. I urge you to support SB 888 and take this important step towards improving the well-being of individuals and families affected by behavioral health challenges.

Respectfully,



Senator Antonio L. Hayes
40th Legislative District – MD