



**Prince George's
County
Youth Action Board**

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Road
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*“The YAB
envisions a
world where
there is no youth
homelessness. A
world in which
there are safe,
compassionate
spaces for YYA
and where youth
are healthy,
strong, safe, and
connected.”*

**Senate Bill 876 Maryland Medical Assistance Program – Limited Behavioral
Health Services
Finance Committee
March 12, 2024**

TESTIMONY IN FAVOR WITH AMENDMENTS

The Prince George's County Youth Action Board (YAB) was established in November of 2019 to provide an outlet for youth to speak about their experiences with homelessness. The YAB is the decision-making body of youth and young adults with lived experience of homelessness or housing instability. The YAB is also tasked with providing direct input on all issues related to youth homelessness, offering insight and expertise throughout the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Project (YHDP) implementation process, generating ideas for system innovation and improvement as well as serving with the YHDP Steering Committee to oversee implementation and participate in the continuous quality improvement process.

The need for quality mental health and substance use care has never been higher. Young people prefer to access mental health care without a diagnosis, both because diagnoses carry stigma and can create barriers rather than facilitate access to care. Developmental science suggests that young people need services to lessen burdensome requirements on adolescents that increase paperwork or wait times.

SB 876 can help. This bill provides coverage for limited behavioral health services without a diagnosis, including evaluation and treatment planning, family therapy, group therapy, individual therapy, services related to prevention, promotion, education, or outreach, and any other services determined necessary based on input received from stakeholders. Importantly, the bill includes young people themselves as required stakeholders in determining which services will be made available.

As written, the bill's provisions only apply to young people under the age of 18. **We recommend that the bill be amended to apply to young people under the age of 26.** Youth and young adults between the ages of 16 and 25 are a unique population. They are situated at the intersection of childhood and adulthood— a developmental period where their biological, physical, and psychological functioning changes rapidly. By intervening during these years, we can improve young people's overall well-being and help them lead meaningful, healthy, and successful lives.

This amendment is important for our organization because of the age group we serve (16-26 years old), and with the aftereffects of Covid-19, the need for mental health services for this age group is at an all-time high. Youth and young adults are seeking pathways for positive outlets and opportunities to improve the status of their mental health and if these services are limited, the growth of the youth we serve will be affected.

For additional
information,

There is precedent through the Maryland Medical Assistance Program for covering services for transition age youth: child psychiatric rehabilitation program (PRP) services are available to “young adults,” and supported employment services (typically an adult service) are available to transition-age youth ages 16-25. Youth Peer Support is defined in [COMAR 10.21.10.07](#) as a service for youth ages 18-26. Providing these services to transition age youth is made possible by § 1115 waivers.

To ensure that the department is able to provide coverage to young adults up to age 26, **we recommend that the bill be amended to include the following language:** “The department shall apply for and obtain any federal authority necessary to implement the requirements of this section, including applying to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid services for an amendment to any of the state's § 1115 waivers necessary to implement the requirements of this section or the state plan.”

The need for behavioral health care is at an all-time high. The coverage for limited behavioral health services without a diagnosis in this bill is needed now more than ever- especially to facilitate access to care for transition age youth. **The Prince Georges County Youth Action Board urges this committee to pass SB 876 with amendments to include coverage for transition age youth.**

