



## TESTIMONY TO THE FINANCE COMMITTEE

### **SB0876: Maryland Medical Assistance Program- Limited Behavioral Health Services**

**POSITION: Support**

**BY: Linda Kohn, President**

**DATE: March 11, 2024**

**The League of Women Voters believes that every U.S. resident should have access to affordable, quality health care, which includes behavioral health care for children and adolescents.**

This care is sorely needed. The Youth Risk Behavior Survey for the 2021-2022 school year, highlighted in The Maryland Department of Legislative Services *2024 Issue Papers*,<sup>1</sup> revealed that between 35% and 40% of Maryland middle and high schoolers reported feeling “sad/hopeless,” with over 25% of middle schoolers and 20% of high schoolers disclosing that they have “seriously considered suicide.”

**By removing a major barrier to accessing behavioral health care, Senate Bill 876 would allow more of these children to be helped.** It would enable a healthcare provider to deliver limited behavioral health services to ANY covered child under the age of 18 thought to need care, including those without a documented behavioral health diagnosis. This would expand the number of children permitted to receive early screening, evaluation and treatment by a professional for what might be those feelings of “sadness and hopelessness.” A treatment plan, including outreach, education, and individual, family, and/or group therapy, would be designed to address the problem, without the extra burden of requesting pre-authorization and approval for services based on a “covered” diagnosis.

Including individuals under the age of 18 and parents as stakeholders in the process of determining what limited behavioral health services will be provided, will help ensure that treatment will be equitable, relevant, and effective for the young population it’s designed to serve.

**The League of Women Voters Maryland, representing 1,500+ concerned members throughout Maryland, urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 876.**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://dls.maryland.gov/pubs/prod/RecurRpt/Issue-Papers-2024-Legislative-Session.pdf>