



MARYLAND
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE

March 12, 2024

Senate Bill 876

**Maryland Medical Assistance Program - Limited Behavioral Health Services
Senate Finance Committee**

Position: Favorable

The Maryland Catholic Conference (MCC) is the public policy representative of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, which together encompass over one million Marylanders. Statewide, their parishes, schools, hospitals, and numerous charities combine to form our state's second largest social service provider network, behind only our state government.

Senate Bill 876 requires beginning January 1, 2025, the Maryland Medical Assistance Program to provide limited behavioral health services to individuals under the age of 18 years regardless of whether the individual has a behavioral health diagnosis; and requiring the Maryland Department of Health to seek input from stakeholders in determining the limited behavioral health services to be covered.

It's important to note that nearly 1 in 5 children grapple with mental, emotional, or behavioral disorders, such as anxiety, depression, ADHD, ASD, disruptive behavior disorder, or Tourette syndrome.¹ Young people face significant challenges in mental health, and obstacles like limited resources in schools or peer-driven stigma further hinder their access to care. The bill seeks to address these barriers, aiming to make behavioral health services more accessible for families with children.

Currently, families dealing with the lack of a specific diagnosis frequently endure extended waiting periods to receive necessary care. In addressing this issue, the proposed legislation suggests broadening behavioral health services to include preventive and promotional initiatives. This extension aims to actively involve both parents and minors in the intervention process. The Catholic Conference is committed to promoting the overall well-being of individuals, including their spiritual, physical, and mental health, with a focus on preserving the gift of life.

¹<https://www.cdc.gov/childrensmentalhealth/access.html#:~:text=Some%20families%20cannot%20find%20mental,waiting%20lists%20to%20receive%20care.>

For these reasons, the MCC asks for a favorable report on **SB 876**.

Thank you for your consideration.