



February 20, 2024

The Honorable Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk
House Health & Government Operations Committee
House Office Building – Room 241
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Support – Senate Bill 684: Health Insurance – Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Benefits – Sunset Repeal and Modification of Reporting Requirements

Dear Chair Pena-Melnyk and Honorable Members of the Committee:

The Maryland Psychiatric Society (MPS) and the Washington Psychiatric Society (WPS) are state medical organizations whose physician members specialize in diagnosing, treating, and preventing mental illnesses, including substance use disorders. Formed more than sixty-five years ago to support the needs of psychiatrists and their patients, both organizations work to ensure available, accessible, and comprehensive quality mental health resources for all Maryland citizens; and strive through public education to dispel the stigma and discrimination of those suffering from a mental illness. As the district branches of the American Psychiatric Association covering the state of Maryland, MPS/WPS represent over 1000 psychiatrists and physicians currently in psychiatric training.

MPS/WPS support Senate Bill 684: Health Insurance – Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Benefits – Sunset Repeal and Modification of Reporting Requirements (SB 684) as amended. SB 684 requires the insurance carriers to monitor mental health parity requirements created by the federal Wellstone-Domenici Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008 (Wellstone Act), which is significant for several reasons in the realm of mental health care. The Wellstone Act mandates that insurance companies provide coverage for mental health and substance use disorder services on par with coverage for medical and surgical services. This means that insurers cannot impose more restrictive limitations on mental health benefits compared to physical health benefits. By requiring insurance companies to treat mental health and substance use disorder services the same as physical health conditions, the Wellstone Act helps reduce the stigma associated with seeking treatment for these issues.

Prior to the Wellstone Act, many insurance plans provided limited coverage for mental health services, leading to barriers to accessing care. By mandating parity in insurance coverage, the act helps improve access to mental health treatment for individuals who may have otherwise been unable to afford it. With improved insurance coverage for mental health services, individuals have access to a wider range of treatment options, including therapy, counseling, medication, and other interventions. This can lead to better outcomes for those struggling with mental health and substance use disorders.



Patients, especially those with mental health and substance use disorders, need timely access to medication. Please support SB 684, which makes common-sense changes to prior authorization. For all the reasons above, MPS and WPS ask the committee for a favorable report on SB 684 as amended.

If you have any questions regarding this testimony, please feel free to contact Thomas Tompsett Jr. at tommy.tompsett@mdlobbyist.com.

Respectfully submitted,
The Maryland Psychiatric Society and the Washington Psychiatric Society
Legislative Action Committee