



March 25, 2024

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

RE: Support Senate Bill 991: Behavioral Health - Language Assistance Services Pilot Program

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 and WPS represent over 1000 psychiatrists and physicians currently in psychiatric training.

MPS/WPS enthusiastically support Senate Bill 991: Behavioral Health - Language Assistance Services Pilot Program. The primary purpose of the Behavioral Health Language Assistance Services Pilot Program is to provide meaningful access to behavioral health care for children with limited English proficiency (LEP) and their parents or legal guardians. Access to mental health services is a fundamental aspect of public health, and ensuring that language barriers do not prevent individuals from accessing these services is crucial for the well-being of the community. All too often, our members see that language barriers can exacerbate health disparities, particularly in communities with high proportions of individuals with LEP. By providing language assistance services, including interpretation and translation services, the program aims to address these disparities and promote equity in access to behavioral health care. Furthermore, the requirement for health care providers to develop and implement language access plans fosters cultural competence within the behavioral health care system. By understanding the linguistic and cultural needs of their patients, providers can deliver more effective and responsive care, ultimately improving health outcomes for individuals with limited English proficiency.

Finally, the establishment of a competitive grant process for local behavioral health authorities allows for the efficient allocation of resources to areas with the greatest need. This approach ensures that the program targets communities where language barriers are most prevalent and where additional support is necessary to improve access to behavioral health services.



Therefore, for all the reasons above, MPS/WPS ask the committee for a favorable report on SB 991. If you have any questions with regard to 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