

Senate Finance Committee
Senate Bill 328 - Maryland Medical Assistance Program and Health Insurance –
Annual Behavioral Health Wellness Visits - Coverage and Reimbursement

February 4, 2025

SUPPORT

On behalf of the National Association of Social Workers, Maryland Chapter (NASW-MD) and its Private Practice Committee, we are asking for your support for Senate Bill 328 - Maryland Medical Assistance Program and Health Insurance - Annual Behavioral Health Wellness Visits - Coverage and Reimbursement.

We submit this testimony in strong support of Senate Bill 328, which seeks to ensure coverage and reimbursement for annual behavioral health wellness visits under the Maryland Medical Assistance Program and other health insurance providers. This bill represents a critical step in addressing mental health and substance use disorder treatment accessibility, and wellness services provided by independent clinical social workers in private practice.

Through academic research, media coverage, and society-wide personal experiences, Maryland citizens are fully aware of the mental health crisis looming in our state. Addressing this crisis requires multifaceted habilitative and rehabilitative approaches. SB 328 takes an essential first step by identifying mental health needs earlier, potentially circumventing or reducing psychosocial consequences brought on by unrecognized mental health conditions.

Clinical social workers in private practice often serve as a vital bridge in delivering responsive behavioral health care. Ensuring that these providers receive equitable reimbursement for their services will help sustain and expand access to high-quality mental health care in the State. Many of these providers are small business owners who rise to the challenge of addressing Maryland's mental health crisis. By guaranteeing coverage and fair reimbursement for behavioral health wellness visits, SB 328 will create opportunities for these providers to thrive and continue serving their communities effectively.

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We appreciate the bill emphasizes a careful introduction to mental wellness in a safe and professional space with a qualified behavioral health provider who has the necessary time and skills to deliver services with thoughtfulness and expertise. Framing these visits as behavioral health wellness visits, rather than starting with a diagnostic code, provides an opportunity for individuals who may feel hesitant about entering care. This approach allows providers to build trust, establish a therapeutic relationship, and introduce quality behavioral health services gradually, without the immediate stigma or pressure of a clinical diagnosis.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on SB 328 to promote equitable access to behavioral health care, support providers of color in private practice, and uphold high standards of professional competency in mental health assessments and treatment.

Respectfully,

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