



## **Statement of Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA)**

To the Senate Finance Committee

Chair: Senator Pamela Beidle

January 28, 2025

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

### **POSITION: SUPPORT**

Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Hayes and members of the Committee, the Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA) is in support of Senate Bill 328, Maryland Medical Assistance Program and Health Insurance -Annual Behavioral Health Wellness Visits -Coverage and Reimbursement.

SB0328 seeks to expand coverage and reimbursement for annual behavioral wellness visits conducted by a health care practitioners whose scope includes mental health services and substance use disorder care. While this would benefit all Marylanders, it is especially critical for those in the state's eighteen rural counties.

Not uncommon in rural America, and further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, rates of substance use, suicidal risk, and other mental health challenges have deepened rural health disparities<sup>1</sup>. Of concern, Mental Health America's 2024 assessment of rural Maryland counties reported a combined average of 19.39 persons per 100,000 experiencing frequent suicidal ideation<sup>2</sup>. Additionally, research conducted on emergency department discharges in rural Maryland revealed that individuals with opioid use disorder were 5.39 times more likely to experience suicidal ideation<sup>1</sup>.

To further identify and support those experiencing mental health struggles and substance use concerns, coverage must be provided to ensure that those unable to afford care can access essential screenings and resources. For these reasons, MRHA strongly advocates for your support of SB0328.

On Behalf of the Maryland Rural Health Association,

Alexis Garcia, Legislative and Policy Intern

1. Ahuja M, Jain M, Mamudu H, et al. Substance Use Disorder and Suicidal Ideation in Rural Maryland. *Chronic Stress*. 2024;8. doi:10.1177/24705470241268483

2. County and State Data Map: Defining Mental Health across Communities. Mental Health America. <https://www.mhanational.org/mhamapping/mha-state-county-data>