



Testimony for HB 665

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

Position: Favorable

Dear Chair Joseline Pena-Melnyk and members of Health, Government, and Operations Committee:

My name is Ricarra Jones, and I am the Political Director of 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East. We are the largest healthcare workers union in the nation representing 10,000 healthcare workers in long-term care facilities and hospitals across Maryland and Washington, DC. 1199SEIU supports HB 665 because it promotes preventative healthcare which is proven to reduce avoidable hospitalizations and reduce the burden on understaffed hospitals and clinics.

HB 665 can be part of a comprehensive effort to reduce emergency department (ED) wait times and high avoidable hospitalization costs. Between 2007 and 2022, the Maryland General Assembly produced four reports addressing challenges facing Maryland's EDs. This data shows that insufficient access to behavioral healthcare is a common hospital throughput challenge. Patients with untreated anxiety and depression may face an escalation of symptoms, unnecessary hospitalization, and higher acuity levels, which contribute to higher overall costs for the hospital. A recent study analyzing healthcare claims data for 21 million individuals showed that, while only 27% of the study population had a behavioral health diagnosis and/or received behavioral health-specific treatment, those individuals accounted for 56.5% of total healthcare costs.

HB 665 would, if enacted into law, reduce barriers preventing Marylanders from accessing mental healthcare. Ensuring patient access to annual behavioral health wellness visits will allow for early identification and intervention, prevent avoidable hospitalizations, reduce the burden on understaffed hospitals and clinics, and save hospitals money. For those reasons, 1199SEIU supports HB 665 and urges a favorable report.

Sincerely,

Ricarra Jones

Political Director

1199 SEIU United Healthcare Workers East

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