



LEGISLATIVE BLACK CAUCUS OF MARYLAND, INC.

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February 6, 2025

Chair Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk
Health and Government Operations Committee
240 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Chair Pena-Melnyk and Members of the Committee,

The Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland offers strong favorable support for House Bill 665 (HB665) – Maryland Medical Assistance Program and Health Insurance – Annual Behavioral Health Wellness Visits – Coverage and Reimbursement. This bill introduces essential reforms to Maryland's healthcare system by requiring coverage and reimbursement for annual behavioral health wellness visits, ensuring equitable access to mental health screenings and care for all residents. House Bill 665 is a 2025 legislative priority for the Black Caucus.

Black Marylanders face disproportionate barriers to mental healthcare, including financial constraints, provider shortages, and systemic inequities in diagnosis and treatment. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health, Black adults in the United States are more likely than White adults to report persistent emotional distress, yet they are less likely to receive mental health treatment. These disparities contribute to higher rates of untreated mental health conditions, leading to worsening health outcomes and economic instability within Black communities.

House Bill 665 requires the Maryland Medical Assistance Program and private health insurers to provide coverage and reimbursement for annual behavioral health wellness visits. These visits allow licensed healthcare practitioners to assess patients for psychiatric or substance use disorders, ensuring early intervention and appropriate care.

Additionally, the bill mandates that insurers reimburse these visits at the same rate as visits that result in a behavioral health diagnosis. This provision eliminates financial disincentives that could discourage mental health providers from offering preventive screenings, thereby expanding access to care for underserved populations.

Expanding behavioral health access is particularly crucial for Black Marylanders, who are more likely to experience socio-economic challenges that impact mental well-being. By integrating preventive

mental health screenings into routine healthcare, SB 328 supports early detection and treatment, reducing the long-term burden of severe mental health conditions on families and communities.

Furthermore, this legislation aligns with Maryland's commitment to health equity by addressing racial disparities in mental health care access. By ensuring that Medicaid and private insurers provide comprehensive coverage for behavioral health wellness visits, SB 328 strengthens Maryland's public health infrastructure and promotes equitable healthcare for all residents.

For these reasons, the Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland strongly supports House Bill 665 and urges a favorable report.

Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland