



February 10, 2026

**Senate Finance Committee  
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT**

*SB 326 - Physician Assistants - Parity With Other Health Care Practitioners*

Behavioral Health System Baltimore (BHSB) is a nonprofit organization that serves as the local behavioral health authority (LBHA) for Baltimore City. BHSB works to increase access to a full range of quality behavioral health (mental health and substance use) services and advocates for innovative approaches to prevention, early intervention, treatment and recovery for individuals, families, and communities. Baltimore City represents nearly 35 percent of the public behavioral health system in Maryland, serving over 100,000 people with mental illness and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as “behavioral health”) annually.

**Behavioral Health System Baltimore supports SB 326 - Physician Assistants - Parity With Other Health Care Practitioners.** This bill aligns the scope of practice for physician assistants (PA) with that of other medical professionals such as nurse practitioners and licensed social workers. There are currently almost 4,000 PAs practicing in Maryland, a number that has increased 17% since 2020.<sup>1</sup> Allowing PAs to work at the top of their license and expertise will help to address workforce shortages including Maryland’s acute behavioral health workforce shortage.

Maryland faces a severe behavioral health shortage. A 2024 report commissioned by the Maryland Health Care Commission concluded that the state was lacking 32,800 behavioral health workers that would be needed by 2028 to address our behavioral health challenges. This included an estimated shortage of 269 psychiatrists, 338 nurse practitioners, and 242 PAs. Indeed, the report recommends over \$24 million in programming to support nurse practitioner and psychiatric fellowships.<sup>2</sup> Adopting more consistent scope practice policies for PAs that align with these other professionals could help address these challenges without needing to use state resources.

The behavioral health duties that are included in SB 326 would be both impactful and prudent ways to relieve some workforce pressures facing the state. The main behavioral health responsibilities in the bill relate to voluntary and involuntary admissions to psychiatric facilities. Currently, a physician and another health professional are needed to certify these admissions. Nurse practitioners, clinical social workers, professional counselors and others can already provide the second certification. SB 326 does not remove the need for a physician. It only adds PAs to the list of professionals who can provide the additional sign off. Adding PAs to that list is sensible considering the educational and training requirements of PAs.

Maryland needs to reform its licensure and scope of practice policies to expand the number of eligible professionals whenever possible and safe. SB 326 achieves that goal. **We urge the Senate Finance Committee to support SB 326.**

***For more information, please contact BHSB Policy Director Dan Rabbitt at 443-401-6142***

**References:**

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<sup>1</sup> National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants. *Statistical Profile of Board Certified Physician Assistants: 2024 Annual Report*. Available at: <https://www.nccpa.net/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/2024-Statistical-Profile-of-Board-Certified-PAs.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Maryland Health Care Commission. *Investing in Maryland’s Behavioral Health Talent*. October 2024. Available at: [https://mhcc.maryland.gov/mhcc/pages/plr/plr/documents/2024/md\\_bh\\_workforce\\_rpt\\_SB283.pdf](https://mhcc.maryland.gov/mhcc/pages/plr/plr/documents/2024/md_bh_workforce_rpt_SB283.pdf)