



February 27, 2020

**House Appropriations Committee
TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION**

HB 152 Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act of 2020

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 disorder) services and advocates for innovative approaches to prevention, early intervention, treatment and recovery for individuals, families, and communities.

Behavioral Health System Baltimore urges the General Assembly to oppose HB 152: Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act (BRFA), as this bill would significantly cut resources that support behavioral health services in Maryland.

Nearly 35 percent of Marylanders are served through the public behavioral health system (PBHS) in Baltimore City. This equates to approximately, 75,000 people served annually, however need for services is far greater than the current system capacity. In Baltimore City, 24,887 individuals have an opioid use disorder, yet the public system only has capacity to serve 17,587 individuals. This means that nearly 7,300 individuals cannot access opioid treatment services in Baltimore City, the community hit hardest by the opioid overdose epidemic. In addition, suicide rates have been steadily increasing in Maryland and across the United States. According to the CDC, suicide rates have increased 30 percent since 1999.

Restore FY 2021 Reimbursement Rate Increases for Community Behavioral Health Services

The Heroin and Opioid Prevention Effort (HOPE) and Treatment Act of 2017 and the subsequent minimum wage legislation of 2019 provide multi-year reimbursement rate increases for behavioral health services. However, the Governor's FY 2021 budget reduces that reimbursement rate to two percent, which falls far short of the required four percent increase for FY 2021. **Regular reimbursement rate increases for community-based services is a critical strategy to addressing the opioid overdose epidemic in Maryland as they will help to expand access to life-saving treatment and support services.**

The reimbursement rate increases support the infrastructure for PHBS and also increase access to life-saving services for vulnerable individuals in our community. At a time when the opioid epidemic is worsening and suicide rates are increasing, more people need access to traditional outpatient services, crisis services, rehabilitation, and residential treatment. The state should dedicate more resources to expanding access to treatment and support services—not less.

Reject the Funding Formula Change for the Community Health Resources Commission

In Fiscal Year 2016, BHSB was awarded a three-year grant of \$600,000 from the Community Health Resources Commission (CHRC) to support services at the Crisis Stabilization Center. The grant contributes to the operating budget for the project, supporting project management, case management, and peer support services. The citywide Crisis Stabilization Center will provide 24/7 sobering services to individuals who are under the influence of drugs or alcohol. This is an important project, as it will help to expand access to substance use treatment—a key strategy to addressing the opioid epidemic in Maryland.

BHSB opposes the changes HB 152 makes to the funding formula for the CHRC, as it permanently reduces the Commission's operating budget. The CHRC has been a key partner in supporting the Crisis Stabilization Center—a project that satisfies requirements of the HOPE Act—and provides critical resources to communities to expand access to behavioral health care services for underserved populations. **Because the CHRC provides critical resources to communities to support innovative projects that expand access to behavioral health services, BHSB urges the committee to reject the proposed funding formula changes for the CHRC to ensure the Commission's annual budget remains at \$8 million as required by statute.**

BHSB urges the General Assembly to oppose HB 152 and restore the cuts in the FY 2021 budget to reimbursement rates for community-based behavioral health services and the funding formula change to the operating budget for the Maryland Community Health Resources Commission.