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February 11, 2020

Maryland General Assembly
Senate Committee on Budget and Taxation
House Appropriations Committee
Annapolis, Maryland

Re: Support for SB490/HB709 (Human Services- Youth Services Bureaus- Funding)

Dear Senators and Delegates:

I am a mental health services researcher from Catonsville, Maryland. I have a doctorate in health policy and a Master of Public Health degree as well. I use these credentials to conduct behavioral health services research specifically (*i.e.*, studies focused on brain and emotional health including psychiatric, neurologic, and substance use related diseases), and especially as it pertains to low income populations including persons covered by Medicaid, block grants, or those who are otherwise un- or underinsured. Accordingly, I am well versed in the biological, sociological, economic, and governance issues germane to the U.S. health care system, especially as it relates to the optimization of our national and local efforts to maintain behavioral health.

I am also a volunteer Board Member for a mental health center in my community known as The Lighthouse. The Lighthouse is one of 12 Youth Services Boards (YSBs) across Maryland. It currently serves about 60 unique individuals per month (500+ annually) via psychotherapy designed to help them cope with stressors that include school, family, and work-based challenges. Such difficulties are linked to problems like adjusting to a new classroom, marital discord, the death of a loved one, learning disabilities, anxiety about social functioning, and various other forms of depression or maladjustment.

The Lighthouse has a sliding fee scale to welcome all individuals and families in need including those with insufficient funds to cover their medical care. Moreover, the Lighthouse has a unique niche as a certified training facility for emerging therapists and as a treatment facility for prodromal problems (*i.e.*, for emerging issues that do not need full psychiatric and pharmacologic care). As the greater Catonsville/Woodlawn/Arbutus/Western Baltimore City region has a population well in excess of 150,000 persons and 50,000 families, I believe there is and will continue to be strong need for the Lighthouse as a mental health therapeutic resource. Indeed, it is not hyperbole to say that facilities like the Lighthouse represent a high-value community organization that helps to keep Marylanders resilient in the face of the many social and personal pressures we encounter.

Accordingly, I am writing this letter to you in support of the bill SB490/HB709 (Human Services- Youth Services Bureaus- Funding). I support that bill because it codifies existing law regarding funding for facilities like the Lighthouse with on-going funds and a modest (10 percent) increase- a rise in the investment which has not be seen for the last 20 years. From the perspective of the Lighthouse, it

would likely change our state revenue from \$91,000 per year to at least \$100,000. In human terms that would add roughly 100 one-hour therapy sessions-- a very modest gain given the community needs. Moreover, the bill promises similar or greater support to 11 other YSBs across the state which provide services like ours and others which specifically aim to reduce violence and crime, and to assist new immigrants. Accordingly, the \$1.8 million budgetary certainty afforded by this bill (with an actual fiscal impact that is only a fraction of that amount), presents itself as a well-placed investment for Marylanders overall.

Thank you for your attention. Please feel free to contact me form more information about this at any time.

Sincerely and best wishes,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Michael T. Alvo". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "M".