



February 19, 2020

The Honorable Delores G. Kelley
Senate Finance Committee
3 East, Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Oppose – SB 502: Health Insurance - Telehealth - Delivery of Mental Health Services - Coverage for Home Settings

Dear Chairman Kelley and Honorable Members of the Committee:

The Maryland Psychiatric Society (MPS) is a state medical organization whose physician members specialize in the diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of mental illnesses including substance use disorders. Formed more than sixty years ago to support the needs of psychiatrists and their patients, MPS works to ensure available, accessible and comprehensive quality mental health resources for all Maryland citizens; and strives through public education to dispel the stigma and discrimination of those suffering from a mental illness. As the district branch of the American Psychiatric Association covering the state of Maryland excluding the D.C. suburbs, MPS represents over 700 psychiatrists as well as physicians currently in psychiatric training.

MPS opposes Senate Bill 502 (SB 502). Unlike the provision of somatic telehealth care to the patient's home, providing telemental health care to the patient's home is potentially counterproductive. Many interventions used by psychiatrists involve behavioral activation for depression or graduated exposure for anxiety. Using home-based telemental health likely impedes such interventions. In addition, the difficulty of managing acute mental illness, such as acute psychosis, suicidality, or homicidality, in a telemental health care setting when a patient is in their home is also tremendously more complicated.

From a child psychiatrist's perspective, MPS contends that the use of home-based telemental health is particularly problematic. For the same reason that Home and Hospital schooling is contraindicated for the school avoidant population, home-based telemental health results in the same problems, namely, reinforcement of the avoidance. Thus, providing telemental health care may unintentionally result in more children with mental health issues staying in their homes, which from a psychiatric perspective would otherwise indicate the need for a higher level of care.

For these reasons, MPS respectfully asks the committee for an unfavorable report on SB 502. If you have any questions with regard to this testimony, please feel free to contact Thomas Tompsett, Jr. at tommy.tompsett@mdlobbyist.com.

Respectfully submitted,
The Legislative Action Committee for the Maryland Psychiatric Society