

**Testimony in Support of SB 502 with amendment, Health Insurance-Telehealth-Delivery of Mental Health Services – Coverage for Home Settings**

Senate Finance Committee

February 19, 2020

The Mental Health Association of Maryland (MHAMD) is a voluntary, non-profit citizens' organization concerned with all aspects of behavioral health. MHAMD's Coalition on Mental Health and Aging is comprised of representatives from aging, mental health, consumer, family and professional associations and government agencies working together to improve the quality and accessibility of behavioral health assessment, treatment, recovery and illness prevention services for older Marylanders. Coalition members enthusiastically support SB 502 and we would like to add a friendly amendment that reflects the provision of both mental health and substance use disorder services. The amendment would be to change the definition of telehealth so that it reads:

**“TELEHEALTH” INCLUDES THE DELIVERY OF MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER SERVICES TO A PATIENT IN THE PATIENT’S HOME SETTING.**

By virtue of their age, many older adults experience a plethora of physical, social, mental and environmental circumstances that raise the risk of developing both mental health and substance use disorders in later life. Never before has our State been faced with these challenges at such a high rate among the geriatric population. SB 502 is a critical piece of legislation to address growing mental health and substance use disorder needs among our older citizens for several reasons:

- Health, mobility and functional problems will not prevent an older adult from receiving behavioral health care because the older adult could receive in-home services and will not have to travel.
- The pervasive preference that older adults express for in-home mental health and substance use disorder services care can be honored.
- Frail and vulnerable older adults in home and community based service waivers and programs can be offered behavioral health services on par with the somatic services they can receive through telehealth in their homes (parity).
- Stigma, a primary barrier to behavioral health services, will be minimized because the individual does not have to go to a location where they may be seen by others nor will they have to be transported by a relative or friend from whom they'd like to keep treatment private.

SB 502 is a logical and life-saving solution for many of Maryland's older adults and, by extension, their loved ones and care partners. The Maryland Coalition on Mental Health and Aging urges a favorable report on SB 502 with an amendment to change the definition of telehealth to read: **“TELEHEALTH” INCLUDES THE DELIVERY OF MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER SERVICES TO A PATIENT IN THE PATIENT’S HOME SETTING.**