



**2020 SESSION
POSITION PAPER**

BILL: SB 611 – Health – Mental and Emotional Disorders – Consent (Mental Health Access Initiative)

COMMITTEE: Senate Finance Committee

POSITION: Letter of Support

BILL ANALYSIS: SB 611 would provide that all minors have the same capacity as any adult to consent to consultation, diagnosis and treatment of a mental or emotional disorder by a health care provider or clinic and provide that a health care provider may make the determination to share certain information to the minor’s parent, guardian or custodian under certain provisions of law unless the health care provider deems that this disclosure will lead to harm to the minor or deter the minor from seeking care.

POSITION RATIONALE: The Maryland Association of County Health Officers (MACHO) submits a **letter of support for SB 611**, a measure that would remove a lower age of consent for a minor to receive mental health care without parental permission which is currently 16 or older.

Not all youth who need mental health services receive care. When youth are able to consent to receiving mental health services themselves, participation in mental health services will increase. Services can be initiated more quickly, rather than having to wait for parental consent to start. The likelihood of initiation and ongoing participation in mental health services may also increase as youth access options for service settings that reduce barriers to treatment such as transportation and parental participation and support.

SB 611 would put mental health on par with substance use treatment and reproductive care for minors which have been in place for decades. For the latter two services, minors of any age currently can independently present for care and it is at the discretion of the health care provider as to whether a parent or guardian should be notified. Minors of all ages are already considered emancipated. Without this ability to consent, some minors will go untreated and will not receive the services they may desperately need.

Given the number of suicides and other serious mental health conditions in adolescents under age 16, providing youth with better access to care is of paramount importance.

For these reasons, the Maryland Association of County Health Officers submits this **letter of support for SB 611**. For more information, please contact Ruth Maiorana, MACHO Executive Director at рмаioral@jhu.edu or 410-614-6891. *This communication reflects the position of MACHO.*