Committee: Senate Finance Committee

Bill Number: Senate Bill 611

Title: Health – Mental and Emotional Disorders – Consent (Mental Health Access Initiative)

Hearing Date: February 18, 2020

Position: Support

The Maryland Nurses Association (MNA) supports *Senate Bill 611 – Health – Mental and Emotional Disorders – Consent (Mental Health Access Initiative).* This bill would provide that all minors have the same capacity as an adult to consent to consultation, diagnosis, and treatment of a mental or emotional disorder and that a health care provider may decide to provide information to a parent or guardian unless the provider believes the disclosure would lead to harm or deter the minor from seeking care.

MNA strongly supports increasing access to mental health treatment to ensure that minors can lead healthy lives at school, home, and in the community. Nurses often encounter youth with mental health conditions while providing somatic health services. Youth may present with stomach discomfort, headaches, and other physical pain. Unfortunately, the current law prohibits nurses from consulting with minors under the age of 16 without their parents' consent if they believe there is an undiagnosed mental health condition.

Unfortunately, for several reasons, youth may be reluctant to discuss mental health issues with their parents. This includes concerns about stigma and fear of being ostracized from their families, whether real or perceived. This is especially important for youth who have suicidal ideation, have experienced trauma or for LGBTQ youth who have not discussed their sexual orientation with their families.

By providing youth with the capacity to consent, mental health providers can ensure that treatment is provided while also working with minors to ensure that they are in a safe environment in cases where the youth may be experiencing abuse. Providers are also afforded the opportunity to strategize with youth on how to best to discuss these issues with their families, when appropriate.

Thank you for your consideration of our testimony, and we urge a favorable vote. If we can provide any further information, please contact Robyn Elliott at relliott@policypartners.net or (443) 926-3443.