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**SB 611**

February 18, 2020

**TO:** Members of the Senate Finance Committee

**FROM:** Nicholas Blendy, Deputy Director of Government Relations

**RE:** Senate Bill 611 – Health – Mental and Emotional Disorders – Consent (Mental Health Access Initiative)

**POSITION: SUPPORT**

Chair Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** Senate Bill (SB) 611.

According to data published by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration (SAMHSA) in 2016, less than half of the more than 3 million adolescents who experienced depression in the prior year received treatment.<sup>1</sup> This gap in access to treatment stems in part from cultural norms and stigma, creating a barrier for youth seeking care.<sup>2</sup>

In order to address this barrier, states have begun considering lowering the age of consent for minors to access mental health services. In Vermont, for instance, minors of any age can consent to outpatient mental health services, and minors age 14 or older may consent to inpatient mental health treatment.<sup>3</sup> Likewise, Alabama provides minors 14 years of age or older the ability to consent to mental health treatment, and Colorado allows minors age 15 or older the ability to consent to mental health services.<sup>4</sup> Allowing minors to consent to mental health treatment without requiring parental consent will allow for easier access to mental health services, and remove a barrier to treatment.

For the foregoing reasons, we respectfully request a **favorable** report on SB 611.

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<sup>1</sup> Ahrensbrak et. al., "Key Substance Use and Mental Health Indicators in the United States: Results from the 2016 National Survey on Drug Use and Health," retrieved: <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/NSDUH-FFR1-2016/NSDUH-FFR1-2016.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/adolescent-development/mental-health/access-adolescent-mental-health-care/index.html>

<sup>3</sup> Vt. Stat. Ann. Tit. 18 Section 8350; Vt. Stat. Ann. Tit. 18 Section 7503.

<sup>4</sup> Ala. Code Section 22-8-4; Colo. Rev. Stat. Section 27-65-103.