

ADVOCATES

FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

To: Chair Pendergrass and members of the Health and Government Operations Committee
From: Shamoyia Gardiner, Education Policy Director
Re: House Bill 374: Behavioral Health Administration – Children With Mental Disorders – List of Available Services
Date: February 5, 2020
Position: Support

The Maryland Medical Assistance Program operates as a part of Maryland Medicaid, which covers 23% of low-income Marylanders and one in four children in the state. Children and pregnant people comprise the highest eligibility for Medicaid services, which makes House Bill 374 all the more relevant. 374 will require the Behavioral Health Administration to maintain a list of child mental health providers and make it publicly accessible via its website. The legislation is simple, but its potential impact is profound.

Young people in the United States, particularly those identified as “Millennials” and Gen Z-ers”, have demonstrated spikes in reports of depression and suicidal behaviors. Generation Z in particular is more likely to report being concerned about their mental health than any of generation.¹ Anxiety tops the list of illnesses reported, with many young people expressing stressed by current events including mass shootings, the detention, separation, and deportation of immigrant and migrant families. Nine in ten manifested physical symptoms as a result of their mental anguish.²

Such mental health trends are not present in older adults, denoting a specifically *generational* shift as being a key factor. Children of Millennials born after 2012 (“Gen Alphas”) are potentially more likely to be susceptible to mental illness than previous generations. Income inequality is on the rise across the United States, **and Maryland is not making progress on addressing increasing numbers of children living in concentrated poverty.**³ Parental and household factors, like socio-economic status, housing instability, or social isolation and neglect, directly influence the health of children.⁴

These negative circumstances present nonacademic barriers to student success once they've matriculated into the public education system. Untreated mental illnesses can undergird behavioral issues in the school setting, which are correlated with coming into contact with the justice system at some point in life. Some studies suggest that **as many**

¹ American Psychological Association. *Gen Z more likely to report mental health concerns*. January 2019.

² *ibid*

³ Annie E. Casey Foundation. *Concentrated Poverty 2012-2017 Data Snapshot*. October 2019.

⁴ Sheehan, Rosemary. NIH, Brain Sciences. *Mental Illness in Children: Childhood Illness and Supporting the Family*. , August 7, 2017.

Advocates for Children and Youth builds a strong Maryland by advancing policies and programs to ensure children of every race, ethnicity, and place of birth can achieve their full potential.

as two-thirds of young people in youth detention or correctional settings have at least one untreated mental health issue.⁵

House Bill 347 is a necessary first step to ensure that Maryland and its families are able to adequately meet the needs of current and future generations—regardless of their novelty. **Advocates for Children and Youth strongly urges a favorable report on this bill.**

⁵ OJJDP. Literature Review. *Intersection between Mental Health and the Juvenile Justice System*. July 2017.