



Statement of Maryland Rural Health Association

To the Health and Government Operations Committee

February 20, 2020

House Bill 455: Health Insurance – Coverage for Mental Health Benefits and Substance Use Disorder Benefits – Treatment Criteria

POSITION: SUPPORT

Delegate Kelly, Chair Pendergrass, Vice Chair Pena-Melnyk, and members of the Health and Government Operations Committee, the Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA) is in SUPPORT of House Bill 455: Health Insurance – Coverage for Mental Health Benefits and Substance Use Disorder Benefits – Treatment Criteria.

This legislation would requires certain carriers, on or before March 1 each year, to submit a report to the Maryland Insurance Commissioner to demonstrate the carrier's compliance with the federal Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act; requiring a carrier, on or before March 1 each year, to submit a report to the Commissioner on certain data for certain benefits by certain classification; establishing the Parity Enforcement and Education Fund to provide funds to support and conduct outreach to inform certain consumers of certain rights; etc.

MRHA's mission is to educate and advocate for the optimal health and wellness of rural communities and their residents. Membership is comprised of health departments, hospitals, community health centers, health professionals, and community members in rural Maryland.

Rural Maryland represents almost 80 percent of Maryland's land area and 25% of its population. Of Maryland's 24 jurisdictions, 18 are considered rural by the state, and with a population of over 1.6 million they differ greatly from the urban areas in the state.

Maryland law states that "many rural communities in the State face a host of difficult challenges relating to persistent unemployment, poverty, changing technological and economic conditions, an aging population and an out-migration of youth, inadequate access to quality housing, health care and other services, and deteriorating or inadequate transportation, communications, sanitations, and economic development infrastructure." (West's Annotated Code of Maryland, State Finance and Procurement § 2-207.8b)

The 2018 Maryland Rural Health Plan (www.MDRuralHealthPlan.org), an extensive assessment of Maryland's rural health needs, identified behavioral health problems as a prevalent concern in many rural counties. MRHA believes this legislation will help strengthen behavioral health care provision to one of Maryland's most vulnerable populations.

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