



**2020 SESSION
POSITION PAPER**

BILL: HB 782 – Health – Mental and Emotional Disorders – Consent (Mental Health Access Initiative)

COMMITTEE: Health and Government Operations Committee

POSITION: Letter of Support

BILL ANALYSIS: HB 782 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 HB 782**, a measure that would remove a major barrier to mental health treatment for those under the age of 16. 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.

HB 782 would put access to mental health services on par with substance use treatment and reproductive care for minors. For the latter two services, minors of *any* age have been able to independently access health care, *for decades*. Maryland law has recognized that for certain health issues, requiring parental consent *inhibits* younger adolescents from disclosing serious health problems. HB 782 provides the means for youth to discuss potentially life-threatening issues in a confidential manner.

As with substance use and reproductive concerns, HB 782 allows health care providers the ability to involve parents if, and in their professional judgement, it’s warranted.

The adoption of HB 782 is even more important in an era of social media fueled anxiety and bullying at the middle and high school levels, as well as mental health disorders that have led to teen suicides. Teens need to be able to reach out for help when needed.

For these reasons, the Maryland Association of County Health Officers submits this **letter of support for HB 782**. For more information, please contact Ruth Maiorana, MACHO Executive Director at rmaioral@jhu.edu or 410-614-6891. *This communication reflects the position of MACHO.*