



Testimony on HB 1359
Health Insurance – Requirements for Establishing Step Therapy Protocol
And Requesting Exceptions

House Health and Government Operations Committee

February 27, 2020

POSITION: SUPPORT

The Community Behavioral Health Association of Maryland is the professional organization for providers of community-based mental health and substance use disorder treatment services. Our members serve the majority of the almost-300,000 children and adults who access care through the public behavioral health system. We provide outpatient treatment, residential and day programs, case management and assertive community treatment (ACT), employment supports, and crisis intervention.

There is a high correlation between non-adherence to drug regimens and utilization of high cost care – such as emergency department visits or hospitalization - for individuals with serious mental health disorders treated with psychotropic medications. While various mental health drugs in a specific category may be equally efficacious, there is wide variability among those drugs as to their side effects, which may include liver damage, excessive weight gain, and sexual dysfunction. To the extent that consumers with serious mental health disorders do not have access to drugs whose side effects they can or will tolerate – due to step therapy or fail first protocols - there is a higher risk of non-adherence to the drug regimen.

HB 1359 requires step protocols to be based on clinical practice guidelines versus strictly cost considerations and includes numerous consumer education and protection provisions, such as requiring clearly described processes for an exception to the step therapy protocol that must be accessible and understandable to patients and prescribers.

This is an important consumer protection bill. We urge a favorable report.