



HB 1461

Behavioral Health Programs – Outpatient Mental Health Centers – Medical and Clinical Directors

Hearing Date: March 11, 2020

Position: OPPOSE

Delegate Pendergrass, Delegate Pena-Melnyk, members of the House Health and Government Operations Committee thank you for accepting my testimony on HB 1461, Behavioral Health Programs- Outpatient Mental Health Centers- Medical and Clinical Directors. I am Suanne Blumberg, CEO at Upper Bay Counseling and Support Services. We have been serving both Cecil and Harford Counties for 22 years providing an array of services to all ages. We serve over five thousand consumers each year.

House Bill 1461 would undo a very important piece of legislation that passed with bi-partisan support during the 2019 session. That legislation allows for an OMHC to use a nurse practitioner as the medical director which directly addressed the shortage of psychiatrists who traditionally have been the medical directors, and are very difficult, if not impossible, to find and hire.

House Bill 1461 would leave many providers without a medical director and unable to continue services as this is a required position. The organizations who have used a nurse practitioner as the medical director have reported the nurse practitioners to be competent and a very active member of the staff.

This bill ignores the shortage of psychiatrists felt across the state. There is a national shortage of students going into the field of psychiatry that some say is a low pay specialty. One study in Maryland, which was reported in the Baltimore Sun January 26, 2015 stated that 57% of the 1154 psychiatrists who were listed with insurers could not be reached due to the telephone number being disconnected or they no longer were in practice. Of those they reached, only 14% were accepting new patients and had availability for an appointment within 45 days. The physician's search firm Merritt Hawkins wrote in 2017, "The shortage of psychiatrists is an escalating crisis," noting the severity of the shortage is more severe than any other specialty. This is what we are facing if this bill passes. There just are not enough psychiatrists.

Our organization does currently have a psychiatrist as our medical director. Unfortunately, he will be retiring soon as he has worked far past his retirement age. When he does, I have no other psychiatrist I can use as the medical director. The last three prescribers I have hired have been nurse practitioners. Our clients and our staff work very well with them and our hope is to have one of them transition into the medical director position when our current medical director retires.

I urge you to please Oppose HB 1461.

Thank you,

Suanne Blumberg, CEO

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