

Senate Bill 500 Psychology Interjurisdictional Compact
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
February 16, 2021
Position: SUPPORT

The Mental Health Association of Maryland is a nonprofit education and advocacy organization that brings together consumers, families, clinicians, advocates and concerned citizens for unified action in all aspects of mental health and substance use disorders. **We appreciate the opportunity to provide this testimony in support of Senate Bill 500.**

SB 500 enters Maryland into the Psychology Interjurisdictional Compact (aka PSYPACT), an interstate compact designed to increase access to mental health care. It does this by creating a process whereby Maryland psychologists can deliver telepsychology or temporary in-person care in participating PSYPACT states, and vice versa. As of March 1, 2021, 15 states and the District of Columbia are participating in PSYPACT, including practically every state in our region.

The Maryland General Assembly has taken important steps in recent years to address a rising demand for mental health treatment. We are making progress, but we are not out of the woods yet. Unmet need persists, resources are scarce, and disparities in access to mental health care continue to widen.

The coronavirus is making matters even worse. Isolation, loss of income and grief resulting from the loss of a loved one – not to mention the threat of actually contracting the virus itself – are all having a profound impact on our mental health. Up to 40% of Marylanders have reported feeling anxious or depressed as a result of the pandemic. Maryland suicide rates have been rising since well before COVID-19, but pandemic-related stress and despair are exacerbating these concerns. Calls to the Baltimore crisis hotline doubled between April and July 2020, and as of September the number of callers threatening suicide was five times higher than at the beginning of the pandemic. In Montgomery County, nearly 400 residents went to a hospital emergency room reporting self-injury or suicidal thoughts between July 1 and August 15, 2020.

If we expect to meet this increased demand for treatment, we must think outside the box and use innovative approaches to expand access to care. PSYPACT is an important component in that strategy.

SB 500 will help ensure Marylanders can access mental health care when and where needed. For this reason, **MHAMD supports this bill and urges a favorable report.**

For more information, please contact Dan Martin at (410) 978-8865