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ChildrensNational.org

February 10, 2021

The Honorable Paul G. Pinsky, Chair  
The Honorable Cheryl C. Kagan, Vice-Chair  
2 West  
Miller senate Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

**Re: Support for SB500 & HB970, Maryland Psychology Interjurisdictional Compact**

Dear Senators Pinsky and Kagan, and Members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee:

My name is Laura Gray, Ph.D. and I am a pediatric psychologist working at Children's National Hospital. My job entails providing mental and behavioral health support for children, adolescents, and young adults with acute and chronic medical conditions. I work primarily in our Rockville, MD location and I also reside in Rockville. Children's National prioritizes accessible quality care for youth in the DMV by supporting behavioral health services across the area. Children's National has highly skilled and specialized psychologists offering primary care behavioral health services, neuropsychology, and pediatric psychology (specialization working with medically ill children). We often utilize telehealth sessions to reduce service access barriers for the families we serve. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we have been able to use telemedicine to expand access to services, reducing barriers to care for families across Maryland.

I would like to provide strong testimony in support of the Psychology Interjurisdictional Compact (PSYPACT) bill, (SB500 and HB970). **This bill will increase access to high quality mental health care and increase continuity of mental health services, removing jurisdictional barriers.**

The mental health crisis resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbates longstanding gaps in access to mental health services and continuity of mental health service; these gaps result in steep increases in untreated depression and anxiety in the youth in Maryland. **Best mental health care services include treatment from highly qualified clinicians, continuity of care over time AND access to care at critical times.** Importantly for our youth, this bill enables increased access to specialized mental health care AND continuity of care across many states where patients may go for college, vacation, who live and go to school/work in different jurisdictions, or for those living with multiple guardians across jurisdictions.

Children's National supports this bill because the children and families of Maryland need and deserve increased access to the highest quality mental health care. PSYPACT leads to **improved Continuity of Care**:

**1) Specialty Services**

Many children experience medical trauma and difficulty adjusting to their illnesses. Following treatment with a psychologist inpatient at Children's National, they return home to Maryland. Many of them need extra support to help with readjusting back to home and school. There is a shortage of specialist psychologists. Kids lose out on the care they need with transportation barriers.

*Patient Story:*

One of my patients was a 9-year-old with a debilitating, painful life-limiting illness. His family had to secure medical transport to make the 2.5-hour trip to get his mental health and medical care at Children's National. They spent more time commuting than meeting with doctors. He needed medical care, pain management, and emotional support for end-of-life care. There are no specialists closer to his home. Unfortunately, the patient received fewer services due to the transportation barriers.



## 2) College Students

PSYPACT enables continues support for youth leaving for college. At one of the most challenging transition points for adolescents and young adults, many Maryland youth are forced to abandon their mental health treatment as they move out of state. Particularly for our youth with Medicaid, we are unable to find them out of state mental health clinicians when they leave for college. This transition is difficult for many youth, but much more difficult for those with mental health and chronic medical conditions. Too many times for my patients, they have left for college full of hopes and aspirations, become overwhelmed by the stress of the transition, they experience a mental health crisis, are unable to find a well-qualified therapist, and they are forced to return home for treatment...abandoning their college and professional goals.

## 3) Interjurisdictional Telehealth to increase Access to Care

For many of my patients, we found unexpected improvements in continuity of care with executive orders for cross-state mental health services at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic. With the expansion of telehealth services and ability to follow our patients to college, their treatment improved.

### *Patient Story:*

One of my patients is a 20-year-old female from Maryland with chronic migraines, Vertigo, and ongoing anxiety and depression. A college junior, she had four prior semesters with transitioning to school, becoming overwhelmed by stress, then having exacerbation of her migraines and depression. Every semester she has either returned home early or had to drop several classes, delaying her hopes of graduation and starting her career. THIS year, for the first time, I was able to provide continuous mental and behavioral health care as she returned to college out of state in August (due to executive orders). Together, we identified problems early, created plans to mitigate stress, and worked to apply evidence-based therapeutic strategies to improve her mood. She completed last semester at school, with a full course load and her highest GPA to date – all this despite the stressors related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

We know continuity of care, access to care, and high-quality specialized care are critical to support mental health of Maryland youth. Through this pandemic, we have now seen it work.

### **The children of Maryland need and deserve the mental health support they need to survive and to thrive.**

Please, help us pass the Psychology Interjurisdictional Compact so that we improve access to and continuity of mental health care for Maryland youth. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on SB500/HB970 and look forward to ways to work collaboratively to help our youth reach their goals.

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