



Statement of Maryland Rural Health Association

To the Finance Committee

February 9, 2021

Senate Bill 286 Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services – Modifications

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman, Senator Augustine, and members of the Finance Committee, the Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA) is in SUPPORT of Senate Bill 286 Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services – Modifications.

MRHA supports this legislation that require proposals to the Maryland Department of Health requesting Behavioral Health Crisis Response Grant Program funding contain certain response standards that minimize law enforcement interaction for individuals in crisis, and requiring a local behavioral health authority, for each service or program that receives funding under the Program, to make certain information available to the public.

This legislation would importantly prioritize behavioral health services to individuals in crisis and would dismantle barriers to access to these crisis behavioral health services. Increased access to relevant and quality behavioral health services would greatly benefit rural and underserved communities that typically do not have access to these services. Further, the data that would be available from this legislation would allow rural communities to properly expand and continue to offer these behavioral health service needs of its citizens in crisis.

MRHA's mission is to educate and advocate for the optimal health and wellness of rural communities and their residents. Membership is comprised of health departments, hospitals, community health centers, health professionals, and community members in rural Maryland. Rural Maryland represents almost 80 percent of Maryland's land area and 25% of its population. Of Maryland's 24 counties, 18 are considered rural by the state, and with a population of over 1.6 million they differ greatly from the urban areas in the state.

And while Maryland is one of the richest states, there is great disparity in how wealth is distributed. The greatest portion of wealth resides around the Baltimore/Washington Region; while further away from the I-95 corridor, differences in the social and economic environment are very apparent.

MHRA believes this legislation is important to support our rural communities and we thank you for your consideration.

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