



Maryland
Hospital Association

February 25, 2021

To: The Honorable Shane E. Pendergrass, Chair, House Health & Government Operations Committee

Re: Letter of Information- House Bill 919 – Specialty Mental Health Services and Payment of Claims – Enforcement

Dear Chair Pendergrass:

On behalf of the Maryland Hospital Association's (MHA) 60 member hospitals and health systems, we appreciate the opportunity to comment on House Bill 919. Maryland hospitals are on the front lines of the state's behavioral health crisis. Hospitals and their partners improved access to the most appropriate level of care for Marylanders overall, but for the one in five living with a mental health or substance use disorder, the emergency department often remains the only door to access treatment.

Progress toward achieving a robust behavioral health delivery system, with several points of access to appropriate levels of care, requires seamless operation of the current provider infrastructure. For the most vulnerable populations on Medicaid with behavioral health diagnoses, this infrastructure is facilitated by the administrative services organization (ASO) of the public behavioral health system. MHA acknowledges and appreciates the efforts of the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) and the Maryland General Assembly to resolve continuing issues with the current ASO, Optum Maryland, which launched Jan. 1, 2020.

Maryland hospitals providing specialty behavioral health services continue to struggle with the Optum system. Specialty service professionals, hospital and community based alike, continue to strive for viability to ensure that they can serve individuals, while facing massive financial uncertainties. Last fall, MHA sent the attached letter documenting concerns to MDH. As of today, MHA continues to work with Optum, MDH, and community behavioral health professionals to address these operational issues.

For more information, please contact:
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