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Health and Government Operations Committee

Alcohol and Drug Trainee (ADT) Practice through Telehealth

March 4, 2021

RE: Support of House Bill 1287

Bayside Recovery LLC in support with the Maryland Association for the Treatment of Opioid Dependence (MATOD) desires that the committee provide a favorable position on HB 1287, to allow Alcohol and Drug Trainee (ADT) counselors to continue the provision of telehealth counseling after the current declared Public Health Emergency (PHE).

As essential healthcare providers, substance use disorder (SUD) programs with ADT counselors have remained open during the pandemic, adding telehealth counseling to provide life-saving services. We believe the benefits of allowing for ADTs to continue providing services far outweigh any deficiencies that have been expressed, especially at a time when the overdoses and fatal overdose occurrences in the State are continuing to rise. The ability for Supervision compliance is not impacted, and our patients have an option to continue receive high quality counseling services in an effective and accessible manner that supports continued recovery.

It is time to support efforts that continue to improve, not impair, the “access” and “delivery” of health care to our citizens. SB 646 will permit ADT counselors to continue to provide telehealth counseling while working under State Licensed and Accredited SUD programs, and receiving the required supervision.

Bayside Recovery, located in Calvert County Maryland provides critical substance abuse services to its citizens, many of whom are in the lower income population. Our patients face many challenges with receiving treatment services for their health care needs due to inadequate communications network infrastructure, inability to afford technologies, and public or social services transportation access. These challenges have existed long before the pandemic created by Covid-19 PHE crises. As a result of the State PHE and relaxation of the existing regulations, we have been able to continue to provide essential behavioral counseling services and support necessary to retaining our patients, many of them being considered high risk candidates for COVID related complications, in treatment during the increased isolation aspects necessary in combating the COVID pandemic. We are confident that this capability to remain “connected” to patients has been instrumental in the ability to enabling these patients to remain in treatment as well as assist with the mental health concerns as a result of the prescriptive components e.g. quarantines, etc., necessary to mitigating the COVID pandemic.

Combined with the fact that there is already a severe shortage of qualified professional counseling resources available in the State of Maryland to not support the bill would be crippling to the ability for us to continue to provide essential components of our treatment services, which would likely contribute to the continued rise in the increasing return to the Opioid epidemic crises the State is currently experiencing. The Board of Professional Counselors and Therapists' 2019 Annual report states that more than half of all Alcohol and Drug counselor applications; and more than 62% of certificates and licenses issued, were for ADT counselors. At Bayside currently, 50% of our clinical counseling staff are ADTs we are constantly seeking out qualified individuals to employee and they are simply just not there.

Bayside Recovery urges a favorable report for House Bill 1287.

Robert Galaher,
Program Sponsor, Bayside Recovery LLC