



March 2, 2021

**House Government and Operations Committee
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT**

House Bill 849 Public Health – Medical Records – Fees

Behavioral Health System Baltimore (BHSB) is a nonprofit organization that serves as the local behavioral health authority for Baltimore City. BHSB works to increase access to a full range of quality behavioral health (mental health and substance use) services and advocates for innovative approaches to prevention, early intervention, treatment and recovery for individuals, families, and communities. **Baltimore City represents nearly 35 percent of the public behavioral health system in Maryland, serving over 77,000 people with mental illness and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as “behavioral health”) annually.**

BHSB is pleased to support House Bill 849 Public Health – Medical Records – Fees. This bill would eliminate financial barriers to acquiring the medical records low-income Marylanders need to acquire critical public benefits. This provision is needed to ensure that the cost of obtaining records of one’s own personal medical history does not create barriers to accessing essential public assistance for individuals living with a disability.

The bill as amended by the sponsor prohibits the charging of a fee for providing copies of a medical record necessary to apply for benefits “under the Social Security Act or under any state needs-based benefit or program.” Programs that fall within this language include federal Social Security and Supplemental Security Income disability programs (SSI/SSDI) and Maryland’s Temporary Disability Assistance Program (TDAP).

Individuals seeking to establish eligibility for SSI/SSDI or TDAP invariably face serious medical and financial challenges. They likely earn very little income and struggle to afford basic necessities like food and shelter. Obtaining the medical records needed to apply for public benefits could add substantial costs to their already strained budget - or be cost prohibitive.

These benefits can mean the difference between stable housing and homelessness, or between hunger and putting food on the table. No one should be denied simply because they cannot afford to obtain needed documentation. **HB 849 would eliminate cost barriers that put assistance out of reach for far too many Marylanders living in poverty. BHSB urges a favorable report for HB 849.**

Contact:

Dan Rabbitt
Policy Director, Greater Baltimore Regional Integrated Crisis System (GBRICS)
Behavioral Health System Baltimore
Daniel.Rabbitt@bhsbaltimore.org
443-453-2682