



Statement of Maryland Rural Health Association

To the Health and Government Operations Committee

January 27, 2021

House Bill 191 Maryland Medical Assistance Program - Psychiatrist and Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner Telemedicine Reimbursement - Sunset Termination

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Pendergrass, Vice Chair Pena-Melnyk, Delegate Kelly, and members of the Health and Government Operations Committee, the Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA) is in SUPPORT of House Bill 191 Maryland Medical Assistance Program - Psychiatrist and Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner Telemedicine Reimbursement - Sunset Termination.

MRHA supports this legislation and its continuation of reimbursement of telehealth services during the COVID-19 pandemic. It's essential for Marylanders, especially those living in rural areas, to access quality and equitable behavioral and mental health care given by psychiatrists and psychiatric nurse practitioners in a home or community-based setting.

MRHA's mission is to education 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.

Maryland law states that "many rural communities in the State face a host of difficult challenges relating to persistent unemployment, poverty, changing technological and economic conditions, an aging population and an out-migration of youth, inadequate access to quality housing, health care and other services, and deteriorating or inadequate transportation, communications, sanitations, and economic development infrastructure." (West's Annotated Code of Maryland, State Finance and Procurement § 2-207.8b)

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

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