



# CARROLL COUNTY YOUTH SERVICE BUREAU, INC.

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## **Testimony on HB191**

### **Maryland Medical Assistance Program – Psychiatrist and Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner Telemedicine Reimbursement – Sunset Termination**

House Health, & Government Operations Committee

January 27, 2021

### **POSITION: SUPPORT**

Carroll County Youth Service Bureau (CCYSB) is an outpatient behavioral health clinic licensed by the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH), certified by the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF), and the Department of Juvenile Services (DJS). CCYSB's treatment services support all ages of people with mental health and substance use concerns. We do so through individual, group, family therapy, psychiatric evaluations, and medication management; five of our treatment programs are evidence-based, including Assertive Community Treatment (ACT).

The Carroll County ACT program currently serves 92 adults who have a serious and life-long mental illness. An ACT client's mental illness may be so severe that he/she experiences little or no connection with family and friends. Clients may experience multiple hospitalizations, homelessness, legal issues, and/or incarceration due to behaviors from or symptoms of their mental illness. Our ACT team provides essential services in housing and employment, care management, daily living, therapy, and psychiatric treatment. ACT provides care in patient's homes, homeless shelters and encampments, drop-in centers, virtually anywhere in the community that meets the client's needs. During the initial days of COVID-19 and forward, our ACT team continues providing these services face-to-face; very few counseling, nursing, or care management services are virtual.

CCYSB is very thankful that telehealth psychiatric services were in place when COVID-19 challenges rose to the forefront. During this public health emergency, CCYSB began using telehealth for psychiatric appointments. Telehealth is the single most important strategy in ensuring that our ACT clients have access to psychiatric care and medications, as medication is often a critical component of patients' engagement, care, stabilization, and recovery.

During the use of telehealth during COVID, CCYSB is discovering that psychiatric telehealth has significant advantages for some of our ACT clients, long-term:

- a. Less time in travel: In Carroll County, the distance to client homes is 30-80 minutes round trip for the psychiatric provider or double that for the staff member who makes two roundtrips in picking up and returning a client home.
- b. More visits completed: CCYSB is experiencing fewer patient cancellations and no-show appointments, thus increasing continuity of care for our clients.
- c. Ease of rescheduling: Due to no travel time, it is easier to reschedule a visit for the same week.

- d. Medical issues: If clients cannot participate in face-to-face appointments (due to medical or mental illness), telehealth is a viable option.
- e. Audio-only: The telephone-only option is used on a very minimal basis when face-to-face is not an option, and computer access is not possible.

I respectfully request that you give HB191 a favorable report to continue providing telehealth for ACT psychiatric care, an essential means of service for this most vulnerable population.