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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

Sibus Treatment Services 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). It is time to support efforts that continue to improve, not impair, the “access” and “delivery” of health care to our citizens. HB 1287 will permit ADT counselors to continue to provide telehealth counseling while working under State Licensed and Accredited SUD programs, and receiving the required supervision.

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 the concerns 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.

Since the start of the Covid-19 PHE, Maryland’s long-standing opioid overdose epidemic has only worsened. MDH reports a 14.5% increase in opioid-related fatalities during the first 9 months of 2020 compared to the same time in 2019. The 2,438 annualized opioid-related Marylanders lost in 2020 is an unacceptable 16.7% increase from 2019’s total of 2,090 and is an astounding 13.8% higher than the prior peak of 2,143 opioid-related Maryland fatalities in 2018. Sibus Treatment Services LLC located in Howard County Maryland, provides critical substance abuse services to its citizens as well as individuals in Anne Arundel and Prince Georges county. Both counties that have seen higher percentages of ODs and fatalities than may others in the state.

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



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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. Sibus Treatment Services urges a favorable report for House Bill 1287.

Robert Galaher,
Program Sponsor, Sibus Treatment Services LLC