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Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee March 3, 2022

Opposition to Senate Bill 398 Out-of-State Health Care Practitioners - Provision of Behavioral Health Services via Telehealth - Authorization

The Maryland Association for the Treatment of Opioid Dependence (MATOD) respectfully opposes SB 398. Our mission is to promote high-quality, effective medication assisted treatment for opioid addiction, so individuals, families, and communities can lead healthy lives in recovery and without stigma.

While MATOD appreciates the intent of the legislation to improve access to behavioral health through the use of telehealth, we believe this approach will both disadvantage consumers of services in Maryland as well as the community-based programs providing services.

Currently, telehealth allows flexibility in meeting clients where they are, both in terms of their treatment plan, and where they physically are. Out-of-state providers would not be able to offer clients an in-person option, and client choice is important for any of us, especially for people starting their journey to recovery.

With regard to providers, the bill would allow for out-of-state practitioners to practice telehealth in Maryland, but would not address the issue of Maryland providers being able to provide telehealth services over state lines.

We believe there are other avenues in the pursuit of greater access to behavioral health services. The state needs to invest in the pipeline of people entering the fields of counseling and social work. Tuition assistance and loan repayment programs within the Maryland Higher Education Commission have not been expanded in at least 15 years. Promoting the establishment of multi-state compacts with the health occupations boards where they currently do not exist would also allow for the use of telehealth services by providers from other states who we know meet the standards we have in Maryland.

We ask for an unfavorable report.

MATOD members include community and hospital based Opioid Treatment Programs, local Health Departments, local Addiction and Behavioral Health Authorities and Maryland organizations that support evidence-based Medication Assisted Treatment. MATOD members include thousands of highly trained and dedicated addiction counselors, clinical social workers, physicians, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, nurses, peer recovery specialists and dedicated staff who work every day to save and transform lives.