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Testimony in Support of  
Senate Bill 398 - Out-of-State Health Care Practitioners – Provision of Behavioral Health Services via  
Telehealth – Authorization  
Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee  
March 03, 2022

**The Rural Maryland Council supports Senate Bill 398 - Out-of-State Health Care Practitioners – Provision of Behavioral Health Services via Telehealth – Authorization.** This bill allows a health care practitioner who is not licensed in the State to provide behavioral health services via telehealth to a patient. The bill will allow Marylanders to have more access to behavioral health practitioners that certain parts of the State, specifically rural, are lacking. The bill will not only expand the number of behavioral health practitioners, but also allow patients who cannot travel to their offices to be able to access them virtually.

Rural Marylanders are often in worse health than that of their urban and suburban counterparts, and lack access to medical facilities and practitioners, especially specialty care such as mental health. SB-398 will allow more practitioners to provide behavioral services in the State, giving Marylanders who do not currently have access to behavioral health services the option of visiting with a practitioner from another state through telehealth. According to Mental Health America, in 2019, nearly 50 million (20 %) of adults in the U.S experienced a mental illness, and more than half of these adults go without treatment.

Allowing for more behavioral health options through telehealth will also help those who would have to travel far distances, or those who lack transportation, to have access to the services that they need for their mental health. Often in rural areas, an individual lives far away from any behavioral health practitioners, and possibly farther from the practitioner that meets their specific needs. If an individual must drive an hour to and from a practitioner's office, they are less likely to go because of the time and additional cost to get there. This leads to the individual not receiving the help they need to take care of their mental health. The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) reports that more than 1.3 million Marylanders are in a mental Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSA). That's over 1.3 million Marylanders that do not have access to the appropriate mental health care they need.

The Rural Maryland Council respectfully requests your favorable support of Senate Bill 398.

*The Rural Maryland Council (RMC) is an independent state agency governed by a nonpartisan, 40-member board that consists of inclusive representation from the federal, state, regional, county and municipal governments, as well as the for-profit and nonprofit sectors. We bring together federal, state, county and municipal government officials as well as representatives of the for-profit and nonprofit sectors to identify challenges unique to rural communities and to craft public policy, programmatic or regulatory solutions.*

**"A Collective Voice for Rural Maryland"**