



March 4, 2022

The Honorable Delores E. Kelley  
Senate Finance Committee  
3 East – Miller Senate Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Guy Guzzone  
Senate Budget & Taxation Committee  
3 West – Miller Senate Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Support – SB 781: Public Safety and Behavioral Health Improvement Act

Dear Chairman Kelley, Chairman Guzzone, and Honorable Members of the Committees:

The Maryland Psychiatric Society (MPS) and the Washington Psychiatric Society (WPS) are state medical organizations whose physician members specialize in diagnosing, treating, and preventing mental illnesses, including substance use disorders. Formed more than sixty-five years ago to support the needs of psychiatrists and their patients, both organizations work to ensure available, accessible, and comprehensive quality mental health resources for all Maryland citizens; and strive through public education to dispel the stigma and discrimination of those suffering from a mental illness. As the district branches of the American Psychiatric Association covering the state of Maryland, MPS and WPS represent over 1000 psychiatrists and physicians currently in psychiatric training.

MPS/WPS support Senate Bill 781: Public Safety and Behavioral Health Improvement Act (SB 781). A peer support worker is someone with the lived experience of recovery from a mental health condition, substance use disorder (SUD), or both. Peer support workers provide non-clinical, strengths-based support to others experiencing similar challenges and are “experientially credentialed” by their own recovery journey. Peer support workers practice in a range of settings, including peer-run organizations, recovery community centers, recovery residences, drug courts, and other criminal justice settings, hospital emergency departments, child welfare agencies, homeless shelters, and behavioral health and primary care settings. Finally, peer support specialists liaison with inpatient teams and emergency departments to connect patients with SUD and psychiatric treatment services. While they are not licensed mental health professionals themselves, peer support specialists provide important transitional support between levels of care.

For those reasons, MPS/WPS asks both committees for a favorable report on SB 781. If you have any questions with regard to this testimony, please feel free to contact Thomas Tompsett Jr. at [tommy.tompsett@mdlobbyist.com](mailto:tommy.tompsett@mdlobbyist.com).

Respectfully submitted,  
The Maryland Psychiatric Society and the Washington Psychiatric Society  
Legislative Action Committee