

Senate Bill 637 Health and Health Insurance - Behavioral Health Services - Expansion (Behavioral Health System Modernization Act)

Finance Committee

February 23, 2022

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT

I represent Arrow Child & Family Ministries, a multi-service non-profit that serves over 500 vulnerable youth and families in Maryland each year.

The need for quality mental health and substance use care has never been higher. We are in what the U.S. Surgeon General has called a youth mental health crisis. This crisis comes at a time when Maryland's public behavioral health infrastructure was already in a perilous situation. Back in 2019, the Post-Acute Discharge Planning Workgroup report sent to the Secretary of Health outlined the gaps and problems within the behavioral health system and recommended a number of common-sense reforms. Since then, the problems have only gotten more acute. There are other bills introduced in this session attempting to address psychiatric hospital overstays and voluntary placement challenges. Those bills, along with this bill, all are trying to ensure that many of Maryland's most vulnerable citizens get timely and effective assistance.

SB 637 can help. This bill includes a variety of reforms and enhancements designed to meet the increasing demand for high quality mental health and substance use care. It will increase comprehensive community-based treatment by expanding Maryland's network of Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics, improve health outcomes and treatment quality by increasing the use of measurement-based care in behavioral health and primary care settings, strengthen the behavioral health workforce by expanding resources for peers support networks and peer recovery specialists, improve care for children and youth by increasing the availability of home- and community-based wraparound services, and reduce reliance on law enforcement and emergency departments by ensuring stable reimbursement for crisis response services.

Arrow has worked closely with the Family Centered Treatment Foundation to become a certified provider of Family Centered Treatment, an evidence-based, in-home family therapy model that has show significant and lasting improvement in family functioning and reduced reliance on out of home care in multiple states, including Maryland. This model is identified as the Behavioral Health Administration's EBP for intensive in-home services under the State's 1915(i) Medicaid waiver. Unfortunately, the waiver service is almost never used. In part, this is a result of the rate that has been set is roughly half of what it costs a program to operate this model. This has resulted in a lack of providers interested in providing the services and virtually no families getting needed services, leading to youth in ERs and hospitals and, often, out of home care.

The demand for behavioral health care is at an all-time high. The enhancements in this bill are needed now more than ever. **Arrow Child & Family Ministries urges this committee to pass SB 637.**



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