



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

Finance Committee

February 23, 2022

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT

Atlantic General Hospital Corporation (AGH) is located in Worcester County, a federally-designated medically-underserved area and a state-designated rural community. Founded in 1993, AGH is a 62 bed state-of-the-art, full-service, acute care, inpatient and outpatient hospital and has provider offices in 17 locations. In partnership with Tidal Health, we were awarded an \$11.3 M grant to establish a regional hub for behavioral health that includes a primary behavioral health crisis center located near Tidal Health and a secondary behavioral health crisis center located near Atlantic General Hospital. The Atlantic General center opened on January 31, 2022 and has already treated over 35 people in crisis during the first three weeks.

Mental health and substance use treatment needs in our area have increased significantly throughout the pandemic. Worcester County's FY 22 needs assessment demonstrated the following:

- 20.7 % adults in Worcester county had a depressive disorder. This rate is 16.6% for MD.
- 17.8% of adults experienced poor mental health for >8 days in a 30-day period.
- Nearly 1 in 5 Worcester students considered attempting suicide.
- 22% of middle school students seriously thought about killing themselves.
- Worcester County's population to mental health provider ratio is higher than neighboring counties and the state ratio; there is a dearth of trained providers available.
- Worcester County was ranked 3 out of 24 MD counties with high binge drinking rates among high school students.
- Rates of lifetime substance use among Worcester HS students were higher across the board compared to the overall state (with the exception of IV drug use).

Federal data indicates that 57% of patients are in need of mental health services and 90% are in need of dual mental health and substance use disorder services and do not receive the necessary treatment (SAMHSA, 2019). Lack of available resources and social determinants affecting health equity contribute to these figures.

SBO637 will drive improvements by expanding access to and coverage to include peer support resources, certified community based behavioral health clinics and needed wraparound services. Measurement-based care in outpatient settings will support improved outcomes. Adding these resources will decrease the unnecessary utilization of law enforcement and hospital emergency departments for services that should be provided by in behavioral health settings.

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