

Senate Bill 656 Children – Residential Treatment Centers – Education Funding

Senate Finance Committee

February 22, 2022

Position: SUPPORT

The Mental Health Association of Maryland is a nonprofit education and advocacy organization that brings together consumers, families, clinicians, advocates and concerned citizens for unified action in all aspects of mental health, mental illness and substance use. MHAMD and our Children’s Behavioral Health Coalition appreciate this opportunity to present testimony in support of Senate Bill 656.

SB 656 seeks to authorize certain local behavioral health authorities (LBHA) to approve funding for youths' educational costs incurred during admission to residential treatment centers when those youth are not in a non-public placement. It in essence shifts the approval process from Department of Human Services (DHS) to the Department of Health (MDH), and requests the funding for this be transferred as well. The sponsor amendments, which MHAMD supports, would request additional staffing be provided at MDH to support the administrative burden of the approval process.

Currently, many youths referred to residential treatment centers (RTC) who are not in a non-public placement are unable to access treatment due to burdensome education costs. Families are often forced to pursue a voluntary placement agreement (VPA) and enter into the child welfare system to circumvent this barrier, and youth end up stuck in hospitals waiting on RTC beds while families navigate the cumbersome and invasive VPA process. This all serves to create a backlog in the system and holds up in-demand treatment beds for youth.

Currently, the educational costs for these youth are paid for with state general funds¹ but only if the family enters into a voluntary placement agreement with DHS. This bill would create a simplified process for families other than the VPA process, and increases equity by eliminating these separate pathways for youth depending upon their child’s educational placement.

This bill streamlines processes for families, reduces inefficiencies in state government, and increases equity for youth accessing treatment. MHAMD supports the urging from families who are lifting up this barrier as a reason they’ve been unable to access treatment, and see SB 656 as a simple administrative change which will benefit youth in times of crisis. For these reasons, MHAMD urges a favorable report on SB 656.

¹ Maryland Department of Human Services (December 1, 2021). Annual Report on VPAs for Children and Young Adults. [http://dlslibrary.state.md.us/publications/Exec/DHS/SSA/FL5-505.1\(d\)_2021.pdf](http://dlslibrary.state.md.us/publications/Exec/DHS/SSA/FL5-505.1(d)_2021.pdf)

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