



Maryland
Hospital Association

February 22, 2022

To: The Honorable Delores G. Kelley, Chair, Senate Finance Committee

Re: Letter of Support - Senate Bill 656- Children - Residential Treatment Centers - Education Funding

Dear Chair Kelley:

On behalf of the Maryland Hospital Association's (MHA) 60 member hospitals and health systems, we appreciate the opportunity to support Senate Bill 656.

For families who pursue a voluntary placement agreement to allow a youth to receive critical behavioral health services in a setting like a residential treatment center, it can be difficult to ensure educational expenses are paid for and uninterrupted. SB 656 would allow a core service agency like a local behavioral health authority, to approve funds for educational expenses incurred at a residential treatment center. Families who can find no other option to help their child access behavioral health services can use the voluntary placement agreement pathway. If a youth attended a public school and transferred to a residential treatment center—a non-public special education placement—parents may be “obliged to pay child support” to cover the expense.¹ This bill closes an important gap and could remove an immense financial burden for the patient's family.

In 2019 hospitals participated in two studies of discharge delays among behavioral health patients: in inpatient settings and emergency departments. In both studies, children and adolescents were identified as at risk for a delay, especially children with involvement in one or more state agencies. Maryland hospitals joined the state Department of Health to gather data to better define the reasons behind persistent pediatric hospital overstays. In the fall, an average of 39 hospitals reported data weekly data for eight weeks. An average of 16 hospitals reported at least one child meeting overstay criteria each week, on average there were 25 youth meeting overstay criteria in the emergency department and 25 in inpatient units each week.

Residential treatment centers deliver vital services to youth with intensive needs. Every effort should be made to support them and their families.

SB 656 would help ease financial barriers to education for these youth and their families.

For more information, please contact:
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¹ [SB 656 Fiscal and Policy Note.](#)