



Ashley Black, Staff Attorney  
Public Justice Center  
201 North Charles Street, Suite 1200  
Baltimore, Maryland 21201  
410-625-9409, ext. 224  
[blacka@publicjustice.org](mailto:blacka@publicjustice.org)

---

**SB 637**  
**Health & Health Insurance – Behavioral Health Services – Expansion**  
**(Behavioral Health System Modernization Act)**  
**Hearing of The Senate Finance Committee**  
**February 23, 2022**  
**1:00 PM**

**SUPPORT**

The Public Justice Center (PJC) is a not-for-profit civil rights and anti-poverty legal services organization which seeks to advance social justice, economic and racial equity, and fundamental human rights in Maryland. Our Health Rights Project supports policies and practices that promote the overall health of Marylanders struggling to make ends meet, with the explicit goal of promoting strategies that work to eliminate racial and ethnic disparities in health outcomes. **PJC strongly supports SB 637**, which would require the Maryland Medical Assistance (Medicaid) Program to provide reimbursement for certified peer support specialists, measurement-based care and crisis response. It would also require other insurers, health plans and organizations to provide coverage for certain behavioral health services.

Prior to the pandemic, community-based behavioral health services for low-income adults and children were already scarce and in high demand. With the rise in depression, suicide and substance use, there is now an even greater demand for community-based behavioral health services. In fact, there are 16 counties in Maryland that are experiencing a mental health professional shortage. When behavioral health services are not available in the community, children and adults can cycle in and out of emergency rooms for crisis stabilization and can experience unnecessary contact with law enforcement, which can be dangerous for individuals with behavioral health disabilities in crisis. These issues greatly impact PJC's clients, most of whom must rely on Medicaid when in need of behavioral health services.

SB 637 would reform Maryland's behavioral health system by expanding evidence-based behavioral health services in the community and enhancing care coordination. The bill identifies that peer support is important for the long-term recovery and empowerment of individuals with behavioral health disabilities. SB 637 would also increase home and community based wraparound services, thus improving behavioral health outcomes for children and youth. Finally, if passed, SB 637 would expand certified community behavioral health clinics and enhance crisis response services. All of these components are essential to, preventing hospitalization and increasing long-term recovery.

*The Public Justice Center is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization and as such does not endorse or oppose any political party or candidate for elected office.*

It is time to reform Maryland's behavioral health system to meet the needs of children and adults. For these reasons, the Public Justice Center urges the committee to issue a **FAVORABLE** report for **SB 637**. If you have any questions about this testimony, please contact Ashley Black at 410-625-9409 x 224 or [blacka@publicjustice.org](mailto:blacka@publicjustice.org).