



February 22, 2022

**Senate Finance Committee
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT**

*SB 682 Maryland Medical Assistance Program-Gender-Affirming Treatment
(Trans Health Equity Act of 2022)*

Behavioral Health System Baltimore (BHSB) is a nonprofit organization that serves as the local behavioral health authority (LBHA) for Baltimore City. BHSB works to increase access to a full range of quality behavioral health (mental health and substance use) services and advocates for innovative approaches to prevention, early intervention, treatment and recovery for individuals, families, and communities. **Baltimore City represents nearly 35 percent of the public behavioral health system in Maryland, serving over 77,000 people with mental illness and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as “behavioral health”) annually.**

Behavioral Health System Baltimore supports SB 682- Maryland Medical Assistance Program- Gender-Affirming Treatment (Trans Health Equity Act of 2022) This bill requires the Maryland Medical Assistance Program provide gender-affirming treatment and prohibiting them from an adverse benefit determination related to gender-affirming treatment unless a health care provider with experience prescribing or delivering gender-affirming treatment has reviewed or confirmed the appropriateness of the determination.

BHSB supports SB 682 as it will allow equitable access to vital health care services for transgender people. Research shows that access to gender-affirming medical care is linked to better mental health outcomes. A 2020 study of transgender adults 18 and older found that access to gender affirming care during adolescence was associated with a lower risk of suicidality. It also found that approximately nine out of ten transgender adults who wanted gender affirming care during adolescence but didn’t receive it experienced suicidal ideation at some point in their lifetime. ¹

Current Maryland Medicaid policies create barriers to accessing adequate medical care for trans Marylanders. Without adequate medical care they are exposed to discrimination, harassment, and interpersonal violence. This can also lead to negative behavioral health outcomes. An American Psychological Association report shows the impact of discrimination on adults can lead to a state of heightened vigilance and changes in behavior, which can trigger stress responses. This toxic stress has a negative impact on both physical and mental health. ²We must continue to protect our most vulnerable Marylanders. **As such, BHSB urges the Senate Finance Committee to support SB 682.**

¹ Yurcaba, Jo. *Trans Youth with Access to Early Medical Care Have Access to Better Mental Health Outcomes*. Very Well Mind: Mental Health News, 2020

² Schreiber, Katherine. *Why Transgender People Experience More Mental Health Issues*. Psychology Today, 2016.