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SB 781 – Public Safety and Behavioral Health Improvement Act

Position: *Support*

March 8, 2022

Senate Finance Committee and Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

Bill Summary

SB 781 would require the Maryland Department of Health to adopt regulations that establish criteria for certifying peer support specialists as nonclinical healthcare providers. In addition, it would establish the Behavioral Health Screening Grant Program, with an initial appropriation of \$500,000 and modify provisions governing the Maryland 9-1-1 Board to include specified training for public safety answering point (PSAP) personnel.

MedStar Health's Position

Mounting evidence indicates that screening for early detection and treatment of mental health and substance use disorders can improve quality of life, help contain healthcare costs, and reduce complications from co-occurring behavioral health and medical comorbidities.

Peers offer their unique lived experience with mental health and/or substance use conditions which allows them to provide support focused on advocacy, education, mentoring, and motivation.

We recognize the value these non-clinical peer workers provide and we believe they are most effective when they are fully integrated into both healthcare teams and the community, providing a critical bridge between clinical care and people's daily lives. Peers provide holistic support to clients in their daily lives as they manage their conditions, and their effectiveness lies in their lived experiences managing illness. As a member of the healthcare team, they should be certified or credentialed.

Lastly, research shows that police responses to mental health situations present significant challenges for police and too often result in poor or tragic outcomes for persons with mental illness. We are supportive of any opportunity at reducing arrests and uses of force; reducing emergency department visits; and increasing the use of community-based mental health services. We believe the funds provided in this grant program will help to do just that.

For the reasons listed above, we respectfully ask that you give SB 781 a ***favorable*** report.