



Maryland
Hospital Association

February 22, 2022

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

Re: Letter of Support – Senate Bill 659 – Maryland Medical Assistance Program – Psychiatric Inpatient Care – Admissions Restrictions (Psychiatric Hospital Admissions Equity Act)

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 659. Maryland hospitals are on the front lines of the state's behavioral health crisis. Hospitals and their partners improved access to the most appropriate level of care for Marylanders overall, but for the one in five living with a mental health or substance use disorder, the emergency department (ED) often remains the only door to access treatment.

However, continued capacity shortages challenge our ability to ensure patients receive the right type of care. A 2019 study found 42% of behavioral health ED patients experienced a delay in being discharged or transferred. These delays accounted for 48% of the time those patients spent in EDs.¹ Burdensome administrative requirements, such as the Maryland Department of Health's (MDH) "five-denial" rule, which requires hospitals to obtain a total of five denials before contacting MDH for placement authorization at an inpatient Institution for Mental Disease,² add to these prolonged delays. Clinical judgment should not be overruled by administrative requirements, especially for Maryland's most vulnerable behavioral health patients who need the right level of care as soon as it is available.

For these reasons, we urge a *favorable* report on SB 659.

For more information, please contact:
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¹ "Behavioral Health Patient Delays in Emergency Departments," MHA (September 2019), www.mhaonline.org/docs/default-source/resources/behavioral-health/behavioral-health-patient-delays-in-emergency-departments-study-2019.pdf

² "Provider Alert: Authorization for Admission to Inpatient IMDs of Adults 22-64 Years of Age," Optum Maryland (May 4, 2021), maryland.optum.com/content/dam/ops-maryland/documents/provider/Alerts/may-2021/PROVIDER%20ALERT_AUTH%20for%20Admission%20to%20IMD.pdf