



Sheppard Pratt

Written Testimony

Senate Finance Committee House Health and Government Operations Committee

SB659 / HB684 Maryland Medical Assistance Program - Psychiatric Inpatient Care - Admissions Restrictions (Psychiatric Hospital Admissions Equity Act)

February 15, 2022

Position: Support

Sheppard Pratt thanks the Maryland General Assembly for your longstanding leadership and support for increasing access to mental and behavioral health treatment in Maryland. This testimony outlines Sheppard Pratt's **support for SB659 / HB684 Maryland Medical Assistance Program - Psychiatric Inpatient Care - Admissions Restrictions (Psychiatric Hospital Admissions Equity Act)**. It is our hope that the Maryland General Assembly vote a favorable report on this legislation.

The legislation before you will prohibit the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) from limiting or restricting admission of a Medicaid recipient for inpatient care at a specialty psychiatric hospital unless the restriction is based on medical necessity.

There have been barriers placed on Medicaid admissions to specialty psychiatric hospitals in the past to limit admissions based on budgetary impacts. These barriers, while temporarily removed due to an agreement with the federal government, are not in the best interests of our most vulnerable Marylanders. These types of barriers also create additional health and access disparities between the Medicaid and commercially insured populations as these barriers are not in place for commercially insured patients.

While economic barriers should never be the motivation for a patient to receive medically necessary care, we are now facing an unprecedented demand for behavioral and mental health care. Although acute care COVID cases are in the decline, the demand for psychiatric services continues to rise as the ongoing effects of the pandemic continue to take its toll on Marylanders.

The most recent spike of COVID-19 hospitalizations has caused a severe strain on our acute care hospitals, resulting in an increase in patients boarding in the emergency departments while they wait for an inpatient bed. This legislation is one piece of the puzzle that will help to alleviate overcrowding of emergency departments for behavioral and mental health patients – allowing these vulnerable patients to get the right care as soon as possible. Rather than allowing Marylanders to languish unnecessarily in emergency rooms which are not equipped to properly care for psychiatric patients, we need to ensure that barriers on inpatient psychiatric admissions are not a threat in the future.



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Sheppard Pratt stresses to the Committees that this legislation is about taking care of the most vulnerable of our State in the fastest way possible while, at the same time, allowing our emergency rooms to focus on the acute care needs of the population.

Sheppard Pratt urges you to act now to address barriers to admission for psychiatric inpatient care and vote a favorable report on **SB659 / HB684 Maryland Medical Assistance Program - Psychiatric Inpatient Care - Admissions Restrictions (Psychiatric Hospital Admissions Equity Act)**.

About Sheppard Pratt

Sheppard Pratt is the nation's largest private, nonprofit provider of mental health, substance use, developmental disability, special education, and social services in the country. A nationwide resource, Sheppard Pratt provides services across a comprehensive continuum of care, spanning both hospital- and community-based resources. Since its founding in 1853, Sheppard Pratt has been innovating the field through research, best practice implementation, and a focus on improving the quality of mental health care on a global level. Sheppard Pratt has been consistently ranked as a top national psychiatric hospital by *U.S. News & World Report* for nearly 30 years.