



BROOK LANE

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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

Brook Lane strongly **supports SB659 / HB684 Maryland Medical Assistance Program - Psychiatric Inpatient Care - Admissions Restrictions (Psychiatric Hospital Admissions Equity Act)**. Brook Lane believes that this legislation will improve access to vital mental health services for the most vulnerable of Marylanders, and it is our sincerest desire that the Maryland General Assembly vote a favorable report on this legislation.

The legislation in question prohibits the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) from limiting or restricting access to inpatient psychiatric care for Maryland Medicaid beneficiaries at specialty psychiatric hospitals except in instances of medical necessity. Historically, barriers to accessing inpatient mental health care at specialty psychiatric hospitals were put in place for budgetary reasons. These barriers put vulnerable Marylanders at risk and promoted health inequity, as only Medicaid beneficiaries were impacted by these restrictions.

The access to care crisis for mental health services, particularly for youth, was only worsened by the COVID-19 global pandemic. U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy, MD recently issued an advisory calling the challenges confronting American youth today “unprecedented and uniquely hard to navigate.” The challenges of the global pandemic only exacerbated a pre-existing mental health crisis, which saw a 44% increase in high school students having made a suicide plan in the prior year from 2009-2019. As one of the largest providers of child and adolescent mental health services in Maryland, Brook Lane believes that this legislation is a key step in addressing this crisis.

Maryland acute care hospitals experienced unprecedented strain during the recent COVID-19 surge resulting from the Omicron variant. Vulnerable Marylanders experiencing often life-threatening mental health crises throughout the State were often left to board in Emergency Departments while hoping to secure an inpatient psychiatric bed. This legislation contributes to the mental health of Marylanders by removing artificial barriers to inpatient psychiatric care, and will directly support the Maryland health system by streamlining access to inpatient psychiatric care for Medicaid beneficiaries.

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Brook Lane emphasizes to the Committees that this legislation will strengthen Maryland acute care hospitals by easing Emergency Department overcrowding, improve access to care for some of the most vulnerable of our State, and promote health equity in our healthcare system.

Brook Lane 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 Brook Lane

Brook Lane is western Maryland's largest, non-profit mental health system. The main campus in Hagerstown, MD is home to the second largest freestanding psychiatric hospital in Maryland, serving children, adolescents, and adults. Brook Lane provides partial hospitalization services for both adults and children in multiple locations and operates Title 1 special education schools in Washington County and Frederick County. Brook Lane's three outpatient locations offer psychiatry services and therapy for all ages. Our THRIVE program provides children with special needs psychiatric care, as well as physical, occupational and speech therapy services. The Brook Lane InSTEP program provides outpatient and intensive outpatient treatment options for individuals with substance use treatment needs.

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