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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF
House Bill 578 - Maryland Medical Assistance Program -
Prior Authorization for Drug Products to Treat an OUD - Prohibition

Health and Government Operations Committee - House

February 16, 2022

Thank you Chair Pendergrass, Vice-chair Pena-Melnyk, and committee members for the time, work, and care that you have put into improving the quality and accessibility of healthcare services for Marylanders of all ages. On Our Own of Maryland is a statewide behavioral health (BH) peer education and advocacy organization. Our network of 20+ affiliated peer-run Wellness & Recovery Centers located throughout the state offer comprehensive, voluntary recovery support services, free of charge, to community members with mental health and substance use disorders. **We are writing to share our strong support of HB 578 which would prohibit prior authorizations for medications used to treat opioid use disorders for people enrolled in Maryland's Medicaid program.**

Marylanders are dying from opioid-related deaths at unprecedented rates. Between 2019 and 2020, opioid-related deaths increased by 20% in Maryland, and the latest data from the state show a continued increase in 2021.¹ Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT) is an evidence-based practice which combines counseling with use of specific medications for opioid use disorders (MOUD). MAT has been shown to be an incredibly effective treatment for those living with opioid use disorder (OUD), as it not only helps prevent and reduce overdoses, but supports individuals in starting and sustaining their recovery journey.^{2,3} Across our statewide peer network, we have heard countless stories of how MAT has opened the door to healing and recovery from addiction, obtaining employment, and leading a healthy, fulfilling life.

Despite the proven effectiveness of MOUD, many individuals remain untreated due to significant barriers to accessing care. Waiting for an overloaded administrative system to approve a prescription for MAT - especially if the individual is in crisis or has reached a breakthrough point in their choice to seek treatment - can literally become a matter of life and death. The need for rapid access has already been well-established through legislation approved in 2017, which prohibited prior authorizations for the FDA-approved MOUDs (methadone, buprenorphine, and naltrexone) in commercial insurance plans.

Individuals enrolled in Maryland's Medicaid program, who already experience so many socioeconomic barriers, deserve at least the same access to this life-saving treatment as people with private insurance. Illinois, Kentucky, New York, Texas, and the District of Columbia have already passed similar legislation.

OOO strongly urges you to vote in favor of removing this barrier to effective and essential medications for Medicaid enrollees, so individuals living with OUD can start their recovery without unnecessary delays.

¹ <https://beforeitstoolate.maryland.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/34/2021/09/OOCC-Q2-2021-Quarterly-Report.pdf>

² <https://www.samhsa.gov/medication-assisted-treatment>

³ Wakeman SE, Laroche MR, Ameli O, et al. Comparative Effectiveness of Different Treatment Pathways for Opioid Use Disorder. *JAMA Netw Open.* 2020;3(2):e1920622. doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2019.20622