

**Testimony before the Senate Budget and Taxation and Finance Committee
Senate Bill 283: Mental Health – Workforce Development – Fund Established**

****Support with Amendment****

February 8, 2023

Senator Augustine, and Members of the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee:

On behalf of the National Association of Social Workers, Maryland Chapter (NASW-MD) Social Work in Schools Committee, we would like to express our support for Senate Bill 283: Mental Health – Workforce Development – Fund Established.

NASW is the largest national organization of the profession, representing over 120,000 social workers nationwide, with 16,000 licensed in the state of Maryland. Social workers provide the majority of behavioral health services in Maryland, working in hospital and hospice care, with substance use disorders, school mental health services, veterans, child welfare, and providing individual, group, and family psychotherapy.

In 2023, the needs far exceed the capacity of what we can provide. Death by suicide continues to climb, substance abuse treatment is not available for all who seek it while death by overdose reaches record levels, parents of children in need of intense psychiatric treatment can't find providers, schools are unable to hire the trained professionals they need for critical early intervention, local governments are setting up crisis intervention teams as part of the transformation of community policing, but can't hire the mental health professionals to staff the teams.

There just aren't enough of us.

SB 283 is a critical first step. It establishes a permanent funding for the behavioral health workforce, requires a comprehensive assessment of need, and includes a recommendation of the funding needed to meet the need. We hope the workgroup created by the legislation would also conduct a comprehensive review of current state programs that support training, education, and tuition assistance for behavioral health professionals and paraprofessionals and the funding levels of those programs over the years.

We urge you to return a favorable report on SB 283.

Respectfully,

Mary Beth DeMartino, LCSW-C
Executive Director, NASW-MD