



February 7, 2023

**Senate Finance Committee  
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT with Amendments**

*SB 201- Maryland Medical Assistance and Children's Health Insurance Programs-School-Based Behavioral Health Services- Reimbursement*

Behavioral Health System Baltimore (BHSB) is a nonprofit organization that serves as the local behavioral health authority (LBHA) for Baltimore City. BHSB works to increase access to a full range of quality behavioral health (mental health and substance use) services and advocates for innovative approaches to prevention, early intervention, treatment and recovery for individuals, families, and communities. **Baltimore City represents nearly 35 percent of the public behavioral health system in Maryland, serving over 78,000 people with mental illness and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as "behavioral health") annually.**

**Behavioral Health System Baltimore supports SB 201- Maryland Medical Assistance and Children's Health Insurance Programs- School-Based Behavioral Health Services- Reimbursement with amendments to clarify that the funding provided in the bill supplements and does not take the place of current Medicaid funding for community behavioral health providers that currently provide services in school settings.** This bill requires the Maryland Department of Health to apply by December 1, 2023, to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services for a State plan amendment authorizing reimbursement of school-based behavioral health services for Medicaid and MCHP enrollees.

Mental illness and substance use among children are important behavioral health issues that significantly impact children, families, and communities. Behavioral health conditions children and youth experience can tie into major problems found in schools such as chronic absence, low achievement, disruptive behavior and dropping out. Early Intervention and access to behavioral health services in Maryland schools provide students with the resources needed to achieve academic success.

BHSB supports SB 201 because this will add sustainable funding for critical behavioral health services for youth in schools. Maryland has a robust infrastructure of partnerships between schools and community behavioral health providers. BHSB oversees these services in Baltimore City. Community behavioral health providers employ mental health clinicians who work on site at schools, and they often bill Medicaid or private insurance for these services. This model ensures that:

- 1) Insurance participation is maximized.
- 2) students can tap the pipeline of access to a wider array of behavioral health services offered in the community, which are available throughout the summer and holidays when school services are inaccessible.
- 3) existing billing infrastructure is utilized to reduce duplication of effort.

In addition, the Maryland Consortium on Coordinated Community Supports is focusing efforts to do both of these things: 1) emphasizing partnerships with community providers and 2) ensuring that services delivered with these funds are expanding behavioral health services in schools rather than replacing them. Alignment of Consortium and Medicaid reform efforts is critical.

Given the current structure in Baltimore City and other jurisdictions in Maryland it is important that the proposed legislation supplements access to these services and does not cause a disruption in services. As such, **BHSB urges the Senate Finance Committee to support SB 201 with the following proposed amendments:**

**Under Section B., add:**

(5) LICENSED HEALTH PROFESSIONALS AND PARAPROFESSIONALS EMPLOYED BY A MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER PROGRAM LICENSED IN ACCORDANCE WITH § 7.5-401 OF THIS ARTICLE.

**Add section E:**

E) MONEY EXPENDED IN CONNECTION WITH THE STATE PLAN AMENDMENT FOR CARRYING OUT THE PURPOSE OF THIS BILL IS SUPPLEMENTAL TO AND IS NOT INTENDED TO TAKE THE PLACE OF EXISTING MEDICAID FUNDING AND CONTRACTS WITH COMMUNITY BEHAVIORAL HEALTH AGENCIES THAT ARE CURRENTLY UTILIZED FOR THE PROVISION OF BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES IN SCHOOL SETTINGS.

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