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March 7, 2023

**COMMITTEE:** Senate Finance Committee

**BILL:** SB 582 – Behavioral Health Care - Treatment and Access  
(Behavioral Health Model for Maryland)

**POSITION:** Support

The Horizon Foundation is Howard County's community health foundation and the largest independent health philanthropy in the state of Maryland. We lead community change so everyone in Howard County can live a longer, better life.

**The Foundation is pleased to support SB 582 – Behavioral Health Care - Treatment and Access (Behavioral Health Model for Maryland).**

SB 582 will establish the Commission on Behavioral Health Care Treatment and Access, which will be charged with making recommendations regarding on-demand behavioral health services for Maryland residents that are appropriate, accessible, and comprehensive and authorizes the Maryland Department of Health to seek a state plan amendment to establish certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics.

Across the state, mental and behavioral health supports remain a patchwork. Many residents do not avail themselves of help until they reach the point of crisis, and when they do, they often find themselves in emergency departments ill-equipped to meet their needs. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), this issue is especially pronounced in the Black community – between 2018 and 2020, Black Americans had the highest rate of mental health-related emergency room visits.<sup>1</sup> The rate at which Black patients visited emergency departments (96.8 visits per 1,000 people) was nearly double that of White patients (53.4 per 1,000 people) and triple that of Hispanic patients (36.0 per 1,000 people). Moreover, in 2020, the CDC estimates that only 1 in 5 adults living with a mental health disorder received treatment within that same year, with significantly lower rates among Black and Hispanic patients.

Altogether, SB 582 is needed to promote access to care and improve health equity – two of Horizon Foundation's highest priorities. The Foundation has worked to bolster the three key pillars of the behavioral

and mental health care continuum – community-based services and supports, crisis response services, and inpatient treatment.

We have worked to increase access to mental health crisis services through our work with the Greater Baltimore Regional Integrated Crisis Systems (GRBICS) Partnership, as well as helped support the operation of Sheppard Pratt’s new urgent care behavioral health clinic in Elkridge. Through a broad grassroots coalition, the Foundation also assisted the Howard County Public School System in enhancing its mental health supports for students – a program that is expanding to every public school in the County.

SB 582 will bolster Maryland’s behavioral and mental health care continuum, resulting in much-needed community-based supports for communities who have historically lacked access. For these reasons, the Foundation **SUPPORTS SB 582** and urges a **FAVORABLE** report.

Thank you for your consideration.

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<sup>i</sup> Peters, Z. J., Santo, L., Davis, D., & DeFrances, C. J. (2023, March 1). National Health Statistics Reports - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved March 1, 2023, from <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nhsr/nhsr169.pdf>