



Maryland
Hospital Association

February 10, 2023

To: The Honorable Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk, Chair, House Health & Government Operations Committee

Re: Letter of Support- House Bill 82- Maryland Medical Assistance and Children's Health Insurance Programs - School-Based Behavioral Health Services - Reimbursement

Dear Chair Pena-Melnyk:

On behalf of the Maryland Hospital Association's (MHA) 60 member hospitals and health systems, we appreciate the opportunity to comment in support of House Bill 82.

Pediatric behavioral health treatment and accessibility to mental health services are perennial issues continuing to affect families. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), one in five children are diagnosed with a mental disorder, but only 20% of those children received care from a mental health provider. Moreover, each year nearly 5 million children are diagnosed with mental disorders that significantly interfere with daily life.

Additionally, hospitals across the U.S have experienced a considerable uptick in patient admissions and emergency department visits. Emergency department visits for mental health emergencies rose by 24% in 2020 for children between the ages of 5 and 11 and 31% for those 12 to 17. Of these visits, the proportion of visits to the emergency room for girls aged 12-17 nearly tripled during the pandemic.

HB 82 asks the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) to provide reimbursement for school-based behavioral health services in school settings. For many children, their first and only interaction with health workers occurs in schools. By reimbursing for services provided by school nurses, school counselors, psychologists, and social workers, more children will obtain much needed affordable care. In addition to reimbursement mandates, HB 82 requires the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) to offer regular training and assistance to school-based mental health professionals. This is essential to ensure quality and consistent care.

As a champion of behavioral and mental health care, Maryland hospitals and other health care partners work tirelessly to deliver essential inpatient and outpatient care for Maryland youth. MHA fully supports this bill, which is in line with hospitals' commitment to ensuring children in our state have access to mental and behavioral health services.

For these reasons we urge a favorable report of HB 82.

For more information, please contact:
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