



BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Lisa Pearson
Chair

Nikki Highsmith Vernick
President & CEO

Christopher Fortune
Vice Chair

Mark Cissel
Treasurer

Gopi Suri
Secretary

Jonathan Ahn

Yvonne Commodore-
Mensah

Juliet Gilliam

Catherine Hamel

Brian Hepburn

Sharon Hoover

Stacie Hunt

Tracy Miller

Sekou Murphy

Yvette Rooks

Celian Valero-Colon

David Wolf

Lanlan Xu

February 14, 2023

COMMITTEE: House Health and Government Operations Committee

BILL: HB 82 – Maryland Medical Assistance and Children's Health Insurance Programs - School-Based Behavioral Health Services - Reimbursement

POSITION: Support with Amendments

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 HB 82 – Maryland Medical Assistance and Children's Health Insurance Programs - School-Based Behavioral Health Services – Reimbursement with amendments.

HB 82 authorizes behavioral health services providers to receive reimbursement from the Maryland Medical Assistance Program (Medicaid) or the Maryland Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) when delivering certain services in schools.

Maryland is experiencing a crisis with respect to its delivery of mental and behavioral health services to children. In 2020, more than 10% of children 12 and younger experiencing a mental or behavioral health crisis suffered an emergency department stay lasting longer than 24 hours. 13% of children ages 13 to 17 suffered similar fates. Worse, during the depths of the COVID-19 pandemic, emergency department visits rose sharply among children, up through the age of 17, who had attempted suicide. Altogether, more health providers are needed to provide school- and community-based supports to children in crisis to avoid self-harm resulting in emergency department visits.

Over the past decade, Howard County has identified mental and behavioral health services as a critical need in schools. The Horizon Foundation solicited community input into its current strategic plan, and numerous Howard County Health Department officials, School System administrative staff and teachers, and residents identified student mental health as a budding crisis.

Horizon Foundation Testimony
HB 82 – Maryland Medical Assistance and Children's
Health Insurance Programs - School-Based
Behavioral Health Services - Reimbursement
February 14, 2023

In 2018, the Horizon Foundation invested in expanding a school-based pilot that established a mental health counseling program in three schools. Today, mental health is foundational to our public schools – the Howard County Public School System is investing in enhanced school-based mental health supports in each school it operates that includes both 1:1 counseling and wellness check-ins for students offered during the school day.

Mental health continues to be a top priority for the Foundation. In addition to our work with the School System, we have raised awareness through our Mental Health Film Festival and reached thousands of community members with our Emotional Support Human campaign. We have also worked to increase access to mental health crisis services through our work with the Greater Baltimore Regional Integrated Crisis Systems (GRBICS), as well as helped support the launch of Sheppard Pratt's new urgent care behavioral health clinic in Elkridge.

Understanding the important role our community-based mental and behavioral health services providers play in service delivery, the Horizon Foundation has some concerns with HB 82. First, current Maryland Medical Assistance rules may interfere with community providers receiving reimbursement for their services. Current rules stipulate that clinicians can only bill for beneficiaries, students in this instance, once for a given service rendered on a given day. If a provider gives counseling to students in both a school- and a community-based setting within a 24-hour period, a portion of their services would go uncompensated.

Provided HB 82 can be amended to account for the above concern, the Horizon Foundation believes this bill will dramatically improve mental and behavioral health outcomes for youth across Maryland. For this reason, the Foundation **SUPPORTS HB 82 WITH AMENDMENTS** and urges a **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS** report.

Thank you for your consideration.