



TESTIMONY TO THE HEALTH AND GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS COMMITTEE

HB 0082: Maryland Medical Assistance and Children's Health Insurance Programs- School-Based Behavioral Health Services- Reimbursement

POSITION: Support

BY: Nancy Soreng, President

DATE: February 14, 2023

The League of Women Voters Maryland supports **House Bill 0082: Maryland Medical Assistance and Children's Health Insurance Programs- School-Based Behavioral Health Services- Reimbursement**, which would increase children's and adolescents' access to behavioral health care by expanding school-based behavioral health programs. In addition, it directs the Maryland Department of Health to apply to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) for a State plan amendment to enable increased Medicaid funding for these services.

The League of Women Voters believes that every U.S. resident, including children, should have access to quality, affordable behavioral health care that is integrated with, and achieves parity with, physical health care. In its *Statement of Position on Health Care*, the League details its support for behavioral health care goals for children, including: "Early and affordable behavioral health diagnosis and treatment for children and youth from early childhood through adolescence."

Per the American Psychiatric Association:¹

One in five children is adversely impaired by a mental health condition. However, less than half of these children will receive treatment... For youths living in poverty or from racial-ethnic minority groups, access to mental health treatment is even more limited.... Schools are an optimal setting to identify, manage, and sustain progress for children with mental health problems....Delivering mental health treatments in schools has substantial benefits, including improved access to care for far more children...School is familiar meeting place for most children, providing a more accessible and comfortable site for students to receive mental health services than hospital or community mental health settings.

¹ "School as a Vital Component of the Children and Adolescent Mental Health System," by Sharon Hoover Ph.D. et al, 2021, *Psychiatric Services*, Volume 72, Issue 1 pages 1-97

Increasing the availability and funding for school-based behavioral health services will result in far more Maryland school children receiving the care they need and to which they are entitled.

By instituting appropriate and child-centered care in a school-based setting- including screening and early identification, intervention, monitoring, and ongoing treatment delivered by familiar personnel- barriers to care will be reduced. These barriers can include difficulty accessing transportation to off-site care, coordinating care between multiple healthcare sites, frustration associated with long waits for appointments, and the hesitancy to accept help because of the stigma that often accompanies behavioral health treatment.

This program is of vital importance, and for that reason The League of Women Voters and its 1,500+ members urge the committee to give a favorable report to House Bill 0082.