



**Testimony on HB 498**  
**Board of Public Works Public Comment Act**  
House Appropriations Committee  
February 21, 2023  
**POSITION: SUPPORT**

The Community Behavioral Health Association of Maryland (CBH) is the leading voice for community-based providers serving the mental health and addiction needs of vulnerable Marylanders. Our 110 members serve the majority of those accessing care through the public behavioral health system. CBH members provide outpatient and residential treatment for mental health and addiction-related disorders, day programs, case management, Assertive Community Treatment (ACT), employment supports, and crisis intervention.

Decisions made by the Board of Public Works can have serious ramifications for community behavioral health providers and the individuals we serve. However, providers are excluded from participation on the evaluation committees that assess the various proposals submitted by interested vendors. While providers bring a wealth of knowledge regarding the positives and negatives of vendor proposals, the only venue we have for sharing our expertise is with the BPW, after it has received the recommendation of the Maryland Department of Health (MDH). HB 498 would ensure that comments and concerns submitted by the provider community – and other impacted stakeholders - would be included in the BPW's meeting packets and also posted online in advance of the meeting, if at all possible.

For the past three years behavioral health providers have experienced significant financial harm and clinical disruptions as the result of MDH's choice of a lowball vendor, Optum Maryland, that has been unable to perform the basic authorization and claims payment functions required by their contract. The provider community was concerned about the choice of this vendor due to their bid coming in at \$70 million below that of the incumbent, but there was no formal process for communicating our concerns with the BPW nor any assurance that our concerns would be relayed to the BPW. Once these awards are made it is difficult – if not impossible – to change course and hire a competent vendor, so it is critically important that vendors are chosen carefully. We believe the BPW could make better informed decisions if they have access to input from affected parties.

We urge a favorable report for HB 498.

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