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**SB 283 Mental Health - Workforce Development - Fund Established**  
**Health and Government Operations Committee**  
**FAVORABLE**  
**March 21, 2023**

Good afternoon, Chair Peña-Melnyk members of the House Health and Government Operations Committee. I am Tammy Bresnahan, Senior Director of Advocacy for AARP MD. AARP MD on behalf of our almost 900,000 members thank the committee for allowing us to comment and support **SB 283 Mental Health – Workforce Development-Fund Established**. In addition, we thank Senator Augustine for sponsoring this important legislation.

SB 283 establishes the Behavioral Health Workforce Investment Fund to provide reimbursement for costs associated with educating, training, certifying, recruiting, placing, and retaining behavioral health professionals and paraprofessionals.

Behavioral health conditions, because they can be disabling and often co-occur with significant physical illnesses, are major drivers of the very high healthcare costs in America. This includes the costs of long stays in hospitals due to medical complexities, the costs of high use of emergency rooms, and the costs of long-term residential care. Investing in improving the cognitive and behavioral health of older adults can improve health outcomes and help to contain healthcare costs at the local, state, and national levels.

The number of people diagnosed with behavioral health issues, such as depression and anxiety, has risen to new highs during the COVID-19 pandemic. That's inevitably increased the demand for treatment in a health care system that already falls short — particularly when it comes to the mental health of our country's older adults, according to a new report from the Commonwealth Fund, a New York-based foundation supporting efforts to provide better access to high-quality health care in the U.S.

The report, "Comparing Older Adults' Mental Health Needs and Access to Treatment in the U.S. and Other High-Income Countries," analyzed results from a survey of more than 18,000 adults age 65 and older in 11 high-income countries, between March and June 2021. Researchers compared Medicare beneficiaries in the United States with older adults in places like the United Kingdom, France and Germany for their mental health and ability to access and afford treatment.

While nearly all U.S. adults over age 65 have some mental health coverage through their enrollment in Medicare, the report suggests that it's inadequate. The report also states that in the U.S., "Medicare beneficiaries are more likely to report emotional distress or be diagnosed with a

mental health need, compared to older adults in other high-income countries. More than a quarter of older adults in the U.S. said they have mental health needs, defined as either a diagnosed condition, such as anxiety or depression, or self-reported emotional distress. For all these reasons, it is very important to address the needs of those people who experience behavioral health problems in old age.

For these reasons, we ask the committee for a favorable report on SB 283. If you have questions, please contact Tammy Bresnahan at [tbresnahan@aarpp.org](mailto:tbresnahan@aarpp.org) or by calling 410-302-8451.