



MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND
WOMEN'S DEMOCRATIC CLUB

P.O. Box 34047, Bethesda, MD 20827

www.womensdemocraticclub.org

Senate Bill 582

Behavioral Health Care - Treatment and Access (Behavioral Health Model for Maryland)

Senate Finance Committee – March 7, 2023

SUPPORT

Thank you for this opportunity to submit written testimony concerning an important priority of the **Montgomery County Women's Democratic Club (WDC)** for the 2023 legislative session. WDC is one of Maryland's largest and most active Democratic clubs with hundreds of politically active members, including many elected officials.

WDC urges the passage of SB0582. This bill will establish a "Commission on Behavioral Health Care Treatment and Access to make recommendations to provide appropriate, accessible, and comprehensive behavioral Health services to individuals in the State across the behavioral health continuum that are available on demand."¹ The bill defines the meaning of "behavioral health" as substance-related disorders, addictive disorders, mental disorders, life stressors and crises, and stress-related physical symptoms.

The lingering impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the mental health of Maryland's residents is disproportionately seen in our children, elderly, and at-risk family units.² The *2022 KIDS COUNT® Data Book* report shows that children in Maryland, as well as children throughout the United States, are in the midst of a mental health crisis, struggling with anxiety and depression at unprecedented levels. Maryland data show an urgent need to address youth mental health as 1 in 8 young people in the state deal with anxiety or depression.³ Racial and ethnic disparities contribute to disproportionately troubling mental health and wellness conditions among children of color. In addition, many LGBTQ young people are encountering challenges as they seek mental health support.⁴

Furthermore, financial and economic instability leads to greater stress and anxiety for families and children. When a child is living in poverty or in a household facing financial difficulties, they are never immune from the stress of their environment. Uninsured or under-insured children are also less likely to have access to

¹ <https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2023RS/bills/hb/hb1148F.pdf>

² Maryland Center on Economic Policy: New Maryland Data Show the Pandemic's Toll on the Mental Health and Well-Being of Children and Families, <https://www.mdeconomy.org/new-maryland-data-show-the-pandemics-toll-on-the-mental-health-and-well-being-of-children-and-families/>

³ Annie E. Casey Foundation, (2022, August 8). 2022 KIDS COUNT DATA BOOK: 2022 STATE TRENDS IN CHILD WELL-BEING.

<https://www.aecf.org/resources/2022-kids-count-data-book>

⁴ Maryland Center on Economic Policy: New Maryland Data Show the Pandemic's Toll on the Mental Health and Well-Being of Children and Families, (para. v). <https://www.mdeconomy.org/new-maryland-data-show-the-pandemics-toll-on-the-mental-health-and-well-being-of-children-and-families/>



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mental health services, preventing them from securing the help they need in times of crisis.⁵ “While Maryland compares favorably to other states on many measures of economic security because of past policy decisions, the reality is that hundreds of thousands of Marylanders are still struggling to get by. In particular, Maryland’s housing costs are unaffordable for many families,” said Nonso Umunna, MDCEP’s KIDS COUNT director. “Unstable housing is also a major cause of stress and anxiety. Maryland policymakers must continue to take steps to ensure everyone can have a safe, affordable place to live.”⁶

Although discrete policy decisions will chip away at the problem, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), *National Guidelines for Behavioral Health Crisis Care – A Best Practice Toolkit* “[c]risis services must be designed to serve anyone, anywhere and anytime.”⁷ Therefore, continuous, and accessible behavioral health services to all Marylanders is key. Establishing a comprehensive and efficient behavioral health model for Maryland will be a significant advancement in addressing our statewide mental health challenge.

Establishing a commission on behavioral health care treatment and access through the enactment of SB0582 is a critical step forward for the health and well-being for all Marylanders, therefore **we ask for your support for SB0582 and strongly urge a favorable Committee report.**

Diana E. Conway
WDC President

JoAnne Koravos
WDC Advocacy Chair

⁵ Maryland Center on Economic Policy: New Maryland Data Show the Pandemic’s Toll on the Mental Health and Well-Being of Children and Families (para. vii), <https://www.mdeconomy.org/new-maryland-data-show-the-pandemics-toll-on-the-mental-health-and-well-being-of-children-and-families/>

⁶ Ibid. (para. viii)

⁷ National Guidelines for Behavioral Health Crisis Care: Best Practice Toolkit, (p. 52).

<https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/national-guidelines-for-behavioral-health-crisis-care-02242020.pdf>