

**Senate Bill 403 Hospitals and Related Institutions – Residential Treatment Centers - Accreditation**

Senate Finance Committee

February 15, 2024

**Position: SUPPORT**

Mental Health Association of Maryland (MHAMD) is a nonprofit education and advocacy organization that brings together consumers, families, clinicians, advocates and concerned citizens for unified action in all aspects of mental health and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as behavioral health). We appreciate the opportunity to provide this testimony in support of SB 403.

SB 403 would allow Residential Treatment Centers (RTCs), facilities that provide intensive treatment to children and adolescents with serious mental health conditions, to become accredited by Commissions other than the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO).

A combination of worsening mental health among children, and the closure of multiple RTCs over the last decade in Maryland, has resulted in children and adolescents who need intensive mental health treatment being stuck in emergency departments.<sup>1</sup> The continuum of care is plugged: many children lingering in emergency departments are waiting for psychiatric inpatient hospitalization, but there are youth stuck in hospital psychiatric inpatient units awaiting placement in an RTC. There simply are not enough RTCs in Maryland that can treat youth with a wide array of conditions. SB 403 will help by allowing more choice in the accrediting bodies allowed for RTCs, thereby attracting more providers to open or expand units.

Currently, Maryland statute only recognizes the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO). This policy dates back to a time when hospitals were the only providers of RTCs. Since that time, two more accrediting bodies – the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) and the Commission on Accreditation (COA) have long been recognized by the federal government as appropriate to monitor RTCs. In fact, Maryland is the only state not to recognize CARF as an accrediting body for RTCs.

Because CARF and COA focus on a rehabilitative model rather than a medical model, most behavioral health providers choose one of those organizations for their accreditation. To open an RTC in Maryland, they would then need to get a second accreditation, which would be costly in terms of both time and money, discouraging new providers.

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<sup>1</sup> The Baltimore Banner. Maryland kids in distress are being kept in emergency departments for weeks, months. (August 9, 2023). Accessed February 13, 2023. <https://www.thebaltimorebanner.com/community/public-health/hundreds-of-maryland-children-live-in-hospitals-FCLWTVRAZFHKCP74RP5EFJNQ/>

SB 403 is one step to take to alleviate the shortage of residential treatment center beds in Maryland that can treat a wide range of youth. For this reason, MHAMD supports SB 403 and urges a favorable report.