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WRITTEN TESTIMONY

**Senate Bill 124 – Maryland Medical Assistance Program and Health Insurance -
 Annual Behavioral Health Wellness Visits - Coverage and Reimbursement
 Finance Committee – February 13, 2024
 SUPPORT**

Background: SB124 would require the Maryland Medical Assistance Program and health insurers to provide coverage for annual behavioral health wellness visits, regardless of whether a diagnosis is made at the end of the visit.

Written Comments: The Baltimore Jewish Council represents The Associated: Jewish Federation of Baltimore and all of its agencies. This includes Jewish Community Services (JCS), which offers programs and services for people of all ages and backgrounds, helping them achieve their goals, enhance their wellbeing, and maximize their independence. JCS currently provides therapy and medication management to a large population of clients with both commercial and public insurance. These behavioral health intervention services are incredibly helpful in enhancing patient wellbeing. During 2023, JCS performed 225 Annual Behavioral Health Wellness Visits.

One in five Marylanders suffer from a mental health condition, and only a fraction receive the help they need. As mental and behavioral health continue to be at the forefront of our state's focus, it is important that individuals can receive care. Currently, if an individual has a behavioral health assessment from a behavioral health provider and there is no mental illness diagnosis as a result of the appointment, the appointment will not be covered by insurance. Just as we are afforded an annual physical, we should also have access to an annual behavioral health assessment.

The Jewish community historically takes communal responsibility for the vulnerable and underserved – this includes those in poverty; individuals with disabilities; victims of domestic violence, etc. Many of these individuals need readily accessible, high-quality mental and behavioral health services. By targeting early intervention in mental illness, we are removing the stigma around mental health diagnoses; saving money for patients; and providing access to needed care.

For these reasons, the Baltimore Jewish Council urges a favorable report of SB124.

The Baltimore Jewish Council, a coalition of central Maryland Jewish organizations and congregations, advocates at all levels of government, on a variety of social welfare, economic and religious concerns, to protect and promote the interests of The Associated Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore, its agencies, and the Greater Baltimore Jewish community.