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TTY USERS CALL VIA MD RELAY

February 19, 2024

The Honorable Chair Pam Beidle
Chair, Finance Committee
3 East, Miller Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: Senate Bill 453 - Mental Health - Emergency Evaluation and Involuntary Admission Procedures and Assisted Outpatient Treatment Programs - Letter of Support with Amendments

Chair Beidle and Vice Chair Klausmeier and Members of the Finance Committee:

On behalf of the Moore-Miller Administration, with the partnership of the Secretary of Health and the Maryland Department of Health (MDH), I respectfully request a favorable report on Senate Bill 453 - Mental Health - Emergency Evaluation and Involuntary Admission Procedures and Assisted Outpatient Treatment Programs.

Senate Bill 453 supports the Governor's priorities of leaving no one behind with this legislation intended to improve mental health services in Maryland. A large part of the bill establishes assisted outpatient treatment (AOT) in the State. Forty-seven states have some form of authorizing legislation for AOT. It is time for Maryland to follow suit. Under current law, the only court-ordered treatment is involuntary inpatient commitment through the criminal justice system.

The bill establishes court-ordered outpatient treatment at a county level for individuals with serious and persistent mental illness that demonstrate the inability to function in the community without intensive treatment. Programs must be approved and overseen by the local behavioral health authority, and annual reporting is required by the Behavioral Health Administration under MDH. The goal is local administration with centralized oversight. Court-ordered outpatient treatment provides one more tool to help individuals with serious and persistent mental illness and prevent repeated hospitalization, homelessness, and interactions with the criminal justice system.

With the growing need for mental health services, making AOT programs available statewide continues the Governor's and Maryland General Assembly's commitment to improving behavioral health care access and services. MDH is actively staffing and working on the charge of the Commission on Behavioral Health Care Treatment and Access, created by Chapters 290 and 291 and passed by the legislature in 2023.

Senate Bill 453 additionally makes changes to the authority of psychiatric nurse practitioners in the emergency evaluation process. In combination with the establishment of court-ordered outpatient treatment, this legislation is another step in improving and developing mental health access and care in the State.

With the leadership of the Secretary of Health and MDH, I respectfully ask for a favorable report on Senate Bill 453. Amendments to be discussed in the bill hearing.

Thank you for your consideration. If you have questions, please contact June Chung, Deputy Legislative Officer at june.chung@maryland.gov.

Sincerely,

June Chung