



TESTIMONY TO THE FINANCE COMMITTEE

SB0124: Maryland Medical Assistance Program and Health Insurance- Annual Behavioral Health Wellness Visits- Coverage and Reimbursement

POSITION: Support

BY: Linda Kohn, President

DATE: 2/13/2024

The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan organization that works to influence public policy through education and advocacy. **The League believes that every U.S. resident, including children, should have access to quality, affordable behavioral health care that is integrated with, and achieves parity with, physical health care.** Behavioral health problems directly impact a person's physical health, and life. People with untreated behavioral health problems can wind up in Emergency Departments, Intensive Care units, jails, or morgues.

The League supports **Senate Bill 124: Maryland Medical Assistance Program and Health Insurance- Annual Behavioral Wellness Visits- Coverage and Reimbursement**, which would expand access to affordable behavioral health care by mandating that certain health insurers provide coverage and reimbursement for an annual behavioral health wellness visit. **This annual assessment would help with early identification of mental health and substance use problems before they become crises.**

Establishing this wellness visit as a routine covered service would reduce barriers to behavioral health care both by making it more affordable and by reducing the hesitancy to ask for and accept help because of the stigma that often accompanies this type of treatment.

This care is urgently needed. Per the Department of Legislative Services' 2024 Issue Paper on Health and Health Insurance,¹ the *Youth Risk Behavior Survey* for the 2021-2022 school year showed that between 35% and 40% of Maryland middle and high schoolers reported feeling "sad/hopeless." Shockingly, over 25% of middle schoolers and 20% of high schoolers disclosed that they have "seriously considered suicide." The Issue Paper also notes that 27.3% of Maryland adults reported symptoms of anxiety and/or depression, with almost a third of them unable to obtain treatment.

Clearly, Marylanders need increased access to the behavioral health treatment that can reduce this kind of suffering. For that reason, the League of Women Voters Maryland, representing 1,500+ concerned citizens throughout Maryland, urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 124.

¹ <https://dls.maryland.gov/pubs/prod/RecurRpt/Issue-Papers-2024-Legislative-Session.pdf>