



March 8, 2024

**COMMITTEE:** Senate Finance Committee

**BILL:** SB 991 – Behavioral Health – Language Assistance Services Pilot Program

**POSITION:** Support

The Horizon Foundation is the largest independent health philanthropy in Maryland. We are committed to a Howard County free from systemic inequities, where all people can live abundant and healthy lives.

**The Foundation is pleased to support SB 991 – Behavioral Health – Language Assistance Services Pilot Program.** This bill establishes a pilot program for the state to provide grants to local behavioral health authorities to reimburse providers for language assistance services for children with limited English proficiency.

Like many communities across the country, mental and behavioral health needs in Howard County have been on the rise and barriers remain to ensuring robust and equitable access to care. During the Foundation’s recent strategic planning and community engagement process, the lack of culturally competent providers and language barriers were cited by many residents of color, including low-income residents, as key barriers for their ability to access health care in general and achieve good health.

Improving language assistance services would provide more meaningful access to mental health care for young residents that primarily speak a language other than English. With mental and behavioral health needs rising youth in our communities, and as we continue to see stark racial disparities in mental health, we must do everything we can to improve access to care for all.

By reducing health inequities, we believe all people will be able to live abundant and healthy lives, and we strongly believe everyone should have access to compassionate and affordable mental health care. For these reasons, the Foundation **SUPPORTS SB 991 and urges a FAVORABLE report.**

Thank you for your consideration.

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