



Statement of Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA)

To the Senate Finance Committee

Chair: Senator Pamela Beidle

February 12, 2024

Senate Bill 0124: Maryland Medical Assistance Program and Health Insurance - Annual Behavioral Health Wellness Visits - Coverage and Reimbursement

Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Klausmeier, and members of the committee, the Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA) is in SUPPORT of Senate Bill 0124: Maryland Medical Assistance Program and Health Insurance - Annual Behavioral Health Wellness Visits - Coverage and Reimbursement

The mental health of Americans has increasingly gotten worse over the last several years. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, 1 in 5 Americans experience any given type of mental illness, and as for the youth of America, around 17% of kids 6-17 years old experience mental illness. (2023). Maryland is no different. By February 2021, 39% of Marylanders suffered symptoms of anxiety and depression, and yet 31.3% were unable to receive treatment. Nearly 1/3 of those who did not receive needed treatment reported that cost was the main barrier. Nearly 6% of people in Maryland are currently uninsured (National Alliance on Mental Illness Maryland, n.d.). There is an even larger disparity among marginalized groups within the United States and Maryland, which only reinforces an extensive cycle of vulnerability. Without proper treatment, people may resort to substance abuse as a means to cope, and they may see a deterioration in their physical health. Residents of Maryland need affordable and accessible mental health services. Over 1 million of Maryland residents are living in an area with limited mental health professionals, and Marylanders are ten times more likely to be pushed out of network to seek treatment (National Alliance on Mental Illness Maryland, n.d.). With the passing of HB0400, the financial burden associated with seeking mental health services can be relieved, and residents will be able to receive the help that they need. Treatment will not only improve the quality of life of those affected, but it will also improve resident's ability to contribute to society. With many residents living in rural Maryland, this bill would provide a great service to those who may be deterred to seek treatment.

*On behalf of the Maryland Rural Health Association,
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National Alliance of Mental Illness. *Mental health by the numbers.* <https://nami.org/mhstats>

National Alliance of Mental Illness Maryland. (n.d.). *Mental health in Maryland.* <https://www.nami.org/NAMI/media/NAMI-Media/StateFactSheets/MarylandStateFactSheet.pdf>