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February 14, 2024

The Honorable Chair Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk  
Chair, Health and Government Operations Committee  
Room 241, House Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: House Bill 576 - Mental Health - Emergency Evaluation and Involuntary Admission  
Procedures and Assisted Outpatient Treatment Programs - Letter of Support with Amendments

Chair Pena-Melnyk and Vice Chair Cullison and Members of HGO:

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 House Bill 576 - Mental Health - Emergency Evaluation and Involuntary Admission Procedures and Assisted Outpatient Treatment Programs.

House Bill 576 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.

House Bill 576 additionally makes changes to emergency evaluation processes by allowing peace officers to transport individuals to nearby emergency facilities such as a crisis stabilization center and allows psychiatric nurse practitioners to work in the emergency evaluation process in crisis stabilization centers. 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 House Bill 576.

Thank you for your consideration. If you have questions, please contact June Chung, Deputy Legislative Officer at [june.chung@maryland.gov](mailto:june.chung@maryland.gov).

Sincerely,

June Chung