

HB1040 Maryland Medical Assistance Program - Limited Behavioral Health Services

Testimony -

Hearing before the Health and Government Operations Committee-

Good afternoon, Chairman Peña Melnyk, Vice Chair Cullison and members of the Health and Government Operations Committee: I am pleased to present House Bill 1040 Maryland Medical Assistance Program –Limited Behavioral Health Services behalf of the National Coalition of 100 Black Women of Southern Maryland. Our organization advocates on behalf of black women and children. We seek a favorable vote on this bill. This bill would provide limited behavioral health services to individuals under the age of 18 years regardless of whether the individual has a behavioral health diagnosis; it requires the Maryland Department of Health to seek input from stakeholders in determining the limited behavioral health services to be covered.

Depression isn't only an adult problem. Identifying depression early on can be tricky. Children's symptoms are different from adults' and may easily be dismissed. The brains of young children are still developing, and tantrums and mood swings are normal behavior. However, when a child has become unhappy in most aspects of their life, it's time to look for answers beyond ordinary "growing pains." A child who is depressed might feel overwhelmed, tired, or hopeless, or highly irritable. They might also blame themselves for their circumstances and the way they feel. As early as age 8, children can begin to experience depression and anxiety. While lots of people are familiar with signs of these disorders in adults (withdrawal, loss of interest, etc.), it can be harder to spot in kids, especially when they are young. Common symptoms to watch for in children are lethargy, reduced appetite, stomach pain, or difficulty concentrating. Among teenagers, suicide attempts may be associated with feelings of stress, self-doubt, pressure to succeed, financial uncertainty, disappointment, and loss.

Many children and adolescents who attempt suicide have a significant mental health disorder, usually depression. Identifying it early can make a huge difference. Early intervention makes a big difference in helping a child deal with depression. If a child shows signs of being depressed, it is important for their pediatrician to conduct a developmental screening. For some teens, suicide may appear to be a solution to their problems.

Suicide is the second leading cause of death for children, adolescents, and young adults aged 15-to-24-year-olds. Youth suicide is a serious public health problem, responsible for more deaths among youths ages 10 to 24 years than any single major medical illness. While rare in children younger than 10 years, suicide death rates increase markedly during adolescence and young adulthood. Pediatric suicide rates

have increased significantly in the U.S., nearly tripling between 2007 and 2017 among children ages 10 to 14 years.

Depression and suicidal feelings are treatable mental disorders. The child or adolescent needs to have his or her illness recognized and diagnosed, and appropriately treated with a comprehensive treatment plan.

The typical symptoms of childhood depression: Lack of joy, abandoning play, self-isolation, saying things are not fun, negative talk (I am stupid, no one likes me, I can't do things anymore), lack of energy, inability to enjoy their favorite activities, inability to stay focused or participate in child-oriented activities, crying easily, being inconsolable.

Kids of color are often over-diagnosed by mental health professionals and under-referred for care. It is important that medical professionals have expertise working with children of color and are mindful of their unique pressures. Anxiety and/or depression in children and teens can be triggered by different fear-based external or internal disorders. Signs of an internal disorder can be when a child refuses to be in a public or social situation, demanding to stay home rather than experience what would be a healthy social interaction, and experiences fear and anxiety over having attention drawn to them. Signs of an external disorder, or oppositional defiant disorder can be when a child takes actions that are disruptive around others, like being defiant to caregivers, difficulty sitting quietly, and constantly fighting for control.

We, the National Coalition of 100 Black Women of Southern Maryland on behalf of all children therefore requests a favorable vote on this very important bill.

