



February 13, 2024

**COMMITTEE:** Senate Finance Committee

**BILL:** SB 124 – Maryland Medical Assistance Program and Health Insurance – Annual Behavioral Health Wellness Visits – Coverage and Reimbursement

**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 124 – Maryland Medical Assistance Program and Health Insurance – Annual Behavioral Health Wellness Visits – Coverage and Reimbursement.** SB 124 would require the state’s Medicaid program to cover annual behavioral health wellness visits, regardless of whether that visits results in a specific behavioral health diagnosis.

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. In our county’s most recent health assessment, the number of residents who reported experiencing symptoms of depression and anxiety jumped significantly compared to the last survey in 2018, and only 16% reported receiving some type of treatment.<sup>i</sup> We also continue to see stark racial disparities in mental health. In the same survey, Black and Hispanic residents were much more likely than their White counterparts to report feeling a lack of interest or pleasure in doing things – as were residents with low income – in addition to feelings of being down, depressed or hopeless. There is also growing research that shows chronic stress and trauma due to racism exacerbates mental and behavioral health challenges for people of color.

Physical health and mental and behavioral health are inextricably linked and equally important to living a healthy and abundant life. As mental and behavioral health challenges rise, we must ensure our residents can access the care that they need and deserve. By expanding coverage for behavioral health visits to Medicaid recipients, SB 124 would help fill the gaps and expand access to care for those most in need.

## BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Lisa M. Pearson  
CHAIR

Christopher Fortune  
VICE CHAIR

Gopi Suri  
SECRETARY

Mark Cissell  
TREASURER

Nikki Highsmith Vernick  
PRESIDENT & CEO

Jonathan Ilson Ahn, Esq.

Yvonne Commodore-  
Mensah, Ph.D.

Juliet Gilliam

Catherine Hamel

Brian Hepburn, M.D.

Sharon A. Hoover

Sekou Murphy

Yvette Rooks, M.D.

Celián Valero-Colón, M.D.

David Wolf

Lanlan Xu, Ph.D.

We strongly believe everyone should have access to compassionate and affordable health and mental health care. For this reason, the Foundation **SUPPORTS SB 124 and urges a FAVORABLE report.**

Thank you for your consideration.

---

<sup>i</sup> Howard County Health Assessment Survey, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.hclhic.org/community/data>