



February 19, 2025

**House Health and Government Operations Committee
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT**

HB 743 - Public Health - Health Care Quality Fund for Community-Based Behavioral Health Programs - Establishment

Behavioral Health System Baltimore (BHSB) is a nonprofit organization that serves as the local behavioral health authority (LBHA) for Baltimore City. BHSB works to increase access to a full range of quality behavioral health (mental health and substance use) services and advocates for innovative approaches to prevention, early intervention, treatment and recovery for individuals, families, and communities. Baltimore City represents nearly 35 percent of the public behavioral health system in Maryland, serving over 100,000 people with mental illness and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as “behavioral health”) annually.

Behavioral Health System Baltimore supports HB743 - Public Health - Health Care Quality Fund for Community-Based Behavioral Health Programs - Establishment. As the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) considers increasing the use of civil penalties, the General Assembly should ensure those funds are used to improve behavioral health care quality.

MDH recently issued an informal draft of revisions to COMAR 10.63. This regulation covers behavioral health licensure and oversight. BHSB strongly supports the effort to improve oversight and quality. There has been a concerning rise in the number of licensed providers and the proposed revisions will help, especially if they include new authorities for LBHAs.

The revisions specifically give MDH clear authority to levy civil penalties on providers who fail to meet the expectations included in the regulations. BHSB thinks is a reasonable tool for the state to use in holding providers accountable.

HB743 aims to make sure that revenue generated from civil penalties levied against providers remain in the public behavioral health system. The behavioral health system has been historically underfunded and the behavioral health needs of Marylanders have been on the rise. Dedicating revenue generated from behavioral health providers to improve quality within the system is a commonsense proposal that will improve the system overall without impacting state general funds.

The bill establishes the Health Care Quality Fund for Community-Based Behavioral Health Programs to hold behavioral health civil penalties separately and provide funding for training and other interventions to improve quality. This mechanism will improve behavioral health services in Maryland and ensure a high standard of care. **BHSB urges the House Health and Government Operations Committee to pass HB743.**

For more information, please contact BHSB Policy Director Dan Rabbitt at 443-401-6142