



# Sheppard Pratt

Written Testimony – Damian Lang

## House Bill 1305— Maryland Consortium on Coordinated Community Supports—Workgroup and Study

House Ways and Means Committee

March 5, 2025

Sheppard Pratt appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony in strong opposition to House Bill 1305. While we recognize the importance of reviewing the effectiveness of the Maryland Consortium on Coordinated Community Supports and ensuring that grant funding is equitably distributed, we **strongly oppose the provision in HB1305 that would place a moratorium on grant funding in Fiscal Year 2026.**

Since its inception, the Consortium has played a critical role in expanding access to behavioral health services for Maryland's students. It has:

- **Trained 754 behavioral health providers** in evidence-based interventions.
- **Trained 1,185 school staff** to identify and respond to student mental health needs.
- **Hired 475 new behavioral health professionals**, directly addressing Maryland's severe workforce shortage.
- **Delivered behavioral health services to over 58,000 students** across 1,124 schools.
- **Achieved measurable improvements**, with 77% of students showing progress in behavioral health outcomes and 80% demonstrating positive skill development.

These are not abstract numbers; they represent real students receiving **critical, life-changing support** in schools across the state.

HB1305 **halts grant funding for a full fiscal year** while a workgroup studies the Consortium's framework and funding distribution. While we support efforts to assess and improve grant allocation, **freezing funding will cause severe disruptions in behavioral health services for Maryland's students, particularly those most vulnerable.**

- **A funding pause will lead to the loss of critical services** that students, schools, and families have come to rely on, increasing **barriers to care** for students struggling with mental health challenges.

- **Hundreds of behavioral health professionals hired through Consortium funding may lose their positions**, exacerbating the existing workforce shortage.
- **Programs that have been rigorously designed and evaluated will be forced to shut down**, undoing years of progress in addressing youth mental health needs.
- **Disrupting funding streams jeopardizes provider participation**, making it difficult to recruit and retain behavioral health specialists in school-based settings.

This bill does not just delay funding—it actively **sets back progress at a time when Maryland's students are facing unprecedented mental health crises**. The long-term consequences of a funding freeze will lead to:

- Increased **school absenteeism** and **academic struggles**.
- Greater **strain on emergency departments** due to untreated mental health crises.
- Higher **juvenile justice involvement** and **negative behavioral outcomes** for at-risk youth.

Rather than pausing grant funding, **we urge the General Assembly to conduct its study while continuing to fund behavioral health services**. If the concern is ensuring that funding is distributed equitably, **we should refine the grant process without removing critical services from students who need them**.

We urge this committee to **issue an unfavorable report on HB1305**. The Consortium represents an investment in Maryland's future, and its success should be **strengthened, not stalled**.

Thank you for your consideration. Sheppard Pratt remains committed to working with the legislature to ensure that Maryland's students receive the mental health support they deserve.