

March 3, 2026

House Appropriations Committee
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT

HB 1559 - Children in Unlicensed Settings and Pediatric Hospital Overstay Patients - Placement

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 HB 1559 - Children in Unlicensed Settings and Pediatric Hospital Overstay Patients - Placement. This bill implements a range of new procedures to add Maryland’s pediatric hospital overstay crisis. This comprehensive approach will help further the state’s efforts to place children in safe and supportive settings and more quickly address circumstances that lead to overstays.

Pediatric overstays and placements in unlicensed settings are unacceptably common in Maryland. These circumstances exacerbate the trauma and behavioral health challenges of the children in these situations and can lead to lifelong consequences – and even premature death. They are also disruptive to school and social support, provide poor behavioral health treatment, and cost the state millions. Baltimore City children are at the highest risk for these inappropriate placements with well over double the number of children experiencing this than any other county.¹ Maryland must act with urgency to address this and to serve these vulnerable children more effectively.

HB 1559 takes many meaningful steps towards reforming the out-of-home placement process for children and moving young people out of inappropriate settings as fast as possible. The most fundamental action taken in the bill is to prohibit unlicensed settings entirely. The bill also directs one of the new entities created in the bill to develop a plan to expand Mobile Response and Stabilization Services (MRSS) statewide and to study the New Jersey Children’s System of Care.^{2,3}

HB 1559 is a strong step towards addressing the prevalence of pediatric overstays and the use of unlicensed settings for out-of-home placements in Maryland. **We urge the House Appropriations Committee to support HB 1559.**

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

Endnotes:

¹ Maryland Department of Human Services (DHS). Report on Hospital Stays, Average Length of Stay, and Placements After Discharge. February 6, 2025. Available at: https://dlslibrary.state.md.us/publications/JCR/2024/2024_144-145_2024.pdf

² Quinn, S., Sulzbach, D & Estep, K. Mobile Response and Stabilization Services (MRSS): Best Practice Model Installation. 2024. Innovations Institute, University of Connecticut. Available at <https://innovations-socialwork.media.uconn.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/3657/2024/07/MRSS-Best-Practice-Readiness-Companion.pdf>

³Center for Health Care Strategies. How Does New Jersey’s system of care approach support families involved with child welfare? Casey Family Programs. April 2025. Available at <https://www.casey.org/media/25.07-QFF-TS-SOC-State-profile-NJ.pdf>