



Senate Bill 284 Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act of 2026 Budget and Taxation Committee March 4, 2026
Position: FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS

The Affiliated Santé Group (Santé) is a Maryland-based behavioral-health non-profit organization with more than 30 years of experience delivering mobile crisis, co-responder, and peer-supported behavioral-health programs statewide. Santé currently operates behavioral health services in 16 counties in Maryland and Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, serving more than 18,000 individuals annually. We currently provide a crisis services continuum of care, including 988 and local line Call centers, Crisis Dispatching and Triage Centers, Mobile Crisis Teams, Co-Responder Teams, Mobile Response and Stabilization Services, Urgent Care Centers, Safe Stations, School Intervention Services, CIT Training, and Critical Incident Stress Management. The organization is licensed under COMAR 10.63 and CARF-accredited for Crisis Intervention, Outpatient Mental Health (OMHC), Senior Mental Health Services (SMHS), Peer-led Wellness and Recovery Centers, Psychiatric Recovery programs (PRP), and Mobile Response programs. Our mission is to inspire hope by providing services, advocacy, and education to promote emotional well-being. Santé delivers high-quality services that support individuals seeking behavioral health support and promote stabilization and recovery. The organization is committed to service innovation, equity in behavioral health, and building strong local partnerships.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide this testimony in support of Senate Bill 284 with amendments. SB 284 alters and repeals some required appropriations and makes a series of other statutory changes to reconcile and finance the proposed Fiscal Year 2027 budget. Maryland is facing a significant budget crisis and unprecedented levels of uncertainty at the federal level. Santé recognizes the challenge this presents for state policymakers and understands that difficult decisions will have to be made. However, there remains critical unmet needs across the state that cannot be unaddressed. More than 30% of Marylanders in need of counseling or therapy do not receive it, which is a rate that exceeds the national average. Also, Maryland's percentage of serious suicidal ideation among youth aged 12-17 is the 5th highest in the nation. According to data from the Maryland Department of Health (MDH), the state's 988 helpline received nearly 9,800 calls in September 2025, a 30% increase over the same period in 2024. Although overdose deaths have declined, there were still over 1,300 Marylanders who lost their lives to overdose in 2025. Tending to this unmet need will require strategic investments to expand access to community and school-based mental health care and strengthen Maryland's behavioral health workforce. These are investments that will improve the health of our society and ultimately save the state money through a reduction in preventable hospital emergency department utilization, homelessness and criminal justice involvement. Accordingly, as described in greater detail below, Santé strongly opposes the provisions in SB 284 that would eliminate funding for critically important school- and community-based behavioral health services.

Please REJECT the proposed \$20 MILLION (20%) annual reduction in school mental health funding. According to Maryland's most recent Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), 36% of Maryland high school students are persistently sad or hopeless, 18% of high school students and 24% of middle school students have seriously considered suicide, and 10% of both high school students and middle school students have attempted suicide. SB 284 would reduce the annual budget of the Consortium on Coordinated Community Supports – which provides mental health funding to public schools in every jurisdiction across the state – from \$100 million to \$80 million. Last school year this funding supported over 136,000 students across nearly 90% of all public schools and resulted in improved mental health outcomes for 60-80% of those students. The funding also added over 700 new individuals to Maryland's school behavioral health workforce and trained nearly 6,000 school personnel in behavioral health practices to improve student outcomes. Data from the current school year strongly suggests that this program will continue to produce remarkable outcomes and a positive return on investment. At a time when the demand for quality youth mental health care is greater than ever, reducing school mental health funding by 20% would be devastating for students and families across the state. We are asking that you REJECT language that weakens the state's commitment to expanding Maryland's network of certified community behavioral health clinics (CCBHCs). CCBHCs are federally designated care delivery models that provide a comprehensive range of outpatient mental health and substance use care, coordination with other providers and services, and connection to other systems and supports. Similarly to federally qualified health centers (FQHCs), CCBHCs provide services regardless of insurance status or ability to pay. States implementing the model have seen increased access to care, reduced ED and inpatient utilization, mitigation of behavioral health workforce challenges, higher engagement post discharge from hospitals, and greater integration with physical care. In

2023, the General Assembly passed legislation (SB 362 | HB 1148) to establish a statewide network of CCBHCs, and the Behavioral Health Administration (BHA) has done considerable work over the past year engaging stakeholders and preparing for an eventual application to participate in the federal CCBHC demonstration program. The language in SB 284, however, would make the continuation of this initiative discretionary and leave the future of Maryland's CCBHC program in jeopardy.

Respectfully,

Affiliated Santé Group

12200 Tech Rd, Suite 330 | Silver Spring, MD 20904

301.572.6585 | Fax 301.572.4293

thesantegroup.org