



## BOARD OF TRUSTEES

March 4, 2026

**COMMITTEE:** Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

**BILL:** SB 284 – Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act of 2026

**POSITION:** Support with amendments

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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, with amendments, SB 284 – Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act of 2026.** Specifically, our testimony will focus on funding for the State’s Medicaid program and behavioral health services.

### **Protect and support funding for Medicaid’s IT needs and local navigators**

H.R. 1, passed by the federal government last summer, included the biggest-ever cut to Medicaid in our nation’s history as well as changes to the program, such as work requirements, that are anticipated to cause about 130,000 Marylanders to lose their health care coverage. State health care officials estimate that these cuts and changes could amount to \$2.7 billion in lost federal dollars each year in Maryland, representing about 20% of the state’s current Medicaid funding.<sup>i</sup> Significant additional state resources will also be needed to implement and administer work requirements and other program changes.<sup>ii</sup> In addition, federal enhanced premium tax credits for the Affordable Care Act have expired, making health insurance unaffordable for thousands and threatening the stability of our state’s insurance marketplace.

Since last spring, the Horizon Foundation has been convening a group of statewide Medicaid advocates and working closely with state health officials to come up with solutions to these challenges and work to ensure Marylanders who rely on these programs remain on the rolls. Specifically, we urge you to protect full funding in this year’s budget for the Department of Health’s IT needs that will be critical for the state to effectively implement work requirements for Medicaid with as minimal disruption to enrollees as possible. In addition, we request an additional \$8 million to fund roughly 100 navigator positions. These navigators at the local level are crucial to helping Marylanders who are insured through Medicaid understand what steps they need to take to remain covered and remain in compliance with federal work requirements, which will now require redetermination every six months for the 330,000 adults under who receive Medicaid through the Affordable Care Act expansion. These adults are at risk of losing

their Medicaid coverage simply due to increased red tape. Navigators would provide critical support to Marylanders who struggle to complete and submit the new paperwork requirements on their own.

### **Support and restore funding for mental and behavioral health services**

The Horizon Foundation has worked for many years to improve access to behavioral health care in our community. At the same time, behavioral health needs in Howard County have been on the rise and barriers remain to ensuring robust and equitable access to care. According to our county's most recent health assessment survey of 1000 representative adult residents, more than a third reported that they had been "bothered by having little interest or pleasure in doing things" for several days or more over the previous two weeks.<sup>iii</sup> This number has risen significantly since 2018. In the same survey, respondents under age 45, Black and Hispanic residents and those in households with incomes under \$50,000 per year were significantly more likely to report feeling 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.

Statewide statistics are equally sobering. Maryland's percentage of serious suicidal ideation among youth aged 12-17 is 5th highest in the nation. In Howard County, 30% of middle schoolers report feeling sad or hopeless.<sup>iv</sup> Our Black and Latino girls and our LGBTQIA + children and youth experience the highest rates of mental health challenges, including depression and suicidal ideation. 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. And while overdose deaths are declining, nearly 1,300 Marylanders lost their lives to overdose from October 2024 to September 2025.

The need is clear – we must support strategic investments in the state's behavioral health system. Specifically, we request the following:

1. **Provide a 3% funding increase for community mental health and substance use care providers.** The proposed FY2027 budget as written freezes reimbursement rates at current levels, which essentially represents a cut for behavioral health providers due to high inflation. An increase is essential at this time so programs can keep up with inflation, address critical workforce challenges and continue to meet the demand for community-based care.
2. **Restore the \$20 million cut to the Consortium on Coordinated Community Supports.** The proposed FY 2027 budget would cut annual school mental health funding through the Consortium on Coordinated Community Supports from \$100 million to \$80 million.

This could lead to the loss of about 140 newly hired behavioral health workforce members, with 27,000 fewer students served statewide. The Consortium is a critical program that has expanded mental health services to students and their families, including 1:1 counseling, screenings for depression and anxiety, early intervention for substance use disorders and more. It was created as part of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future in recognition of the critical role that mental health and wraparound services play in supporting student achievement. The Horizon Foundation is a proud steering committee member of the Howard County Community Supports Partnership Hub, one of 12 across the state set up through the Consortium. By design, the hubs address local needs and different environments across the state, but they all provide an opportunity to deliver comprehensive behavioral health services for students, and provide a central point of collaboration between providers, schools and families. In Howard County, the hub is working to increase access to culturally diverse and affirming providers, provide more peer support for youth and parents, and expand substance use prevention and intervention. Slashing school mental health funding by 20% would be devastating for children and families across the state at a time when needs remain incredibly high.

- 3. Support Maryland's network of Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHCs).** CCBHCs are care integration models that mitigate workforce challenges, reduce hospital costs and criminal justice involvement and improve health outcomes. The budget would make MDH's continuation of these efforts discretionary and it does not provide bridge funding necessary to maintain the state's current capacity. These clinics offer residents immediate access to care with same-day access, see patients regardless of insurance status, and offer comprehensive services to both adults and children. We must ensure they continue to meet the needs of residents.

We strongly believe that every Marylander deserves access to the health care they need. For this reason, the Foundation **supports SB 284 with the amendments discussed above** and urges your support as well. Thank you for your consideration.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://marylandmatters.org/2026/01/29/health-official-warns-that-future-medicaid-cuts-could-lead-to-2-7-billion-loss-in-federal-funding/#:~:text=Just%20under%20half%20of%20the,if%20Medicaid%20imposes%20work%20requirements>

<sup>ii</sup> [https://health.maryland.gov/mmcp/Documents/OBBBA%20One-Pager\\_7.11.25.pdf](https://health.maryland.gov/mmcp/Documents/OBBBA%20One-Pager_7.11.25.pdf)

<sup>iii</sup> Howard County Health Assessment Survey, 2024.

<sup>iv</sup> Maryland Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2022-2023.