

**Senate Bill 284: Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act of 2026****Budget and Taxation Committee****March 4, 2026****Position: Support with Amendments**

Disability Rights Maryland (DRM), a non-profit legal advocacy organization, is the federally-mandated Protection and Advocacy agency for the State of Maryland, charged with defending and advancing the rights of individuals with disabilities. For more than 40 years, DRM has represented Maryland children, youth, and adults with disabilities, including those with psychiatric disabilities. We appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 284 with amendments.

SB 284 alters and repeals certain required appropriations and makes a number of other statutory changes to reconcile and finance the proposed Fiscal Year 2027 budget. DRM understands that Maryland is grappling with a budget crisis as well as uncertainty about how deeply the state will be affected by changes at the federal level. DRM also understands that policymakers must be prepared to make difficult decisions about how to allocate limited funds. That said, the state should not cut funding for services that are essential to the health and well-being of children and adults with psychiatric disabilities. DRM strongly opposes the provisions in Senate Bill 284 that would eliminate funding for critically important school-based and community-based behavioral health services.

DRM respectfully respects this Committee to reject the proposed \$20 million (20%) annual reduction in school mental health funding (page 9, lines 6-15). According to Maryland's most recent Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 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 and middle school students have actually attempted suicide.<sup>1</sup> Despite these shocking statistics, SB284 would reduce the annual budget of the Consortium on Coordinated Community Supports, the entity that provides mental health funding to public schools in every jurisdiction in Maryland, from \$100 million to \$80 million.

Last school year, this funding supported more than 136,000 students across nearly 90% of all public schools and resulted in improved mental health outcomes for 60-80% of those students.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Maryland Department of Health 2022-23 Youth Risk Behavioral Survey and Youth Tobacco Survey data. <https://helath.maryland.gov/phpa/ccdpc/Reports/Pages/YRBS-2022-2023.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> Maryland Consortium on Coordinated Community Supports Statewide Impact Report: March 2024-June 2025 .

The Consortium's funding also added more than 700 new individuals to Maryland's school behavioral health workforce and trained almost 6000 school personnel in behavioral health practices to improve student outcomes. Data collected so far for the current school year indicates that these school-based mental health services are producing robust results that are well worth the investment.<sup>3</sup> A reduction in funding for a program that is making a significant difference for students and families statewide would be devastating; it is a shortsighted way to address a funding shortfall; without these essential school-based services, more students will face mental health crises that will result in added costs later.

DRM also asks this Committee to reject language that weakens Maryland's commitment to expanding the state's network of certified behavioral health clinics (CCBHCs) (page 42, lines 9-13). The CCBHCs are federally-designated care delivery models that provide a comprehensive range of outpatient mental health and substance abuse care, coordination with other providers and services, and connection to other systems and supports. CCBHCs serve individuals regardless of insurance status or ability to pay. Senate Bill 284's language would make continuation of the CCBHC initiative discretionary and could threaten the future of community-based mental health services.

In its landmark decision in *Olmstead v. L.C.*, 527 U.S. 581 (1999), the United States Supreme Court held that under the Americans with Disabilities Act, individuals with psychiatric disabilities have the right to live in the community rather than in institutions if community placement is appropriate, the individual does not oppose such a move, and the placement can be reasonably accommodated. School and community-based mental health services are essential to supporting children, youth and adults with psychiatric disabilities in the community; school and community-based services are part of a support system that may prevent costly and restrictive institutional placement and is, therefore, money well invested. DRM respectfully requests that Senate Bill 284 be amended to eliminate the proposed budget cut to the Consortium on Coordinated Community Supports and to reiterate a commitment to keep CCBHCs in place.

For these reasons, DRM supports Senate Bill 284 with amendments.

Contact: Leslie Seid Margolis at [lesliem@disabilityrightsmd.org](mailto:lesliem@disabilityrightsmd.org) or 443-692-2505.

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<sup>3</sup> Maryland Consortium on Coordinated Community Supports Statewide Impact Report: July-September 2025