

## **Testimony SB 870**

**From:** Debra Bennett, mental health advocate and member of Prince George's County Local Care Team

**March 6, 2026**

**Position:** Support

I strongly support Senate Bill 870 – Maryland Department of Health – Adolescent Psychiatric Inpatient Beds – Capacity in Prince George's County and Report.

Since 2020, I have served as a parent advocate on Prince George's County Department of Family Services' Local Care Team (LCT). The LCT is a multidisciplinary body that includes representatives from child-serving agencies and a parent advocate. We meet to review cases, recommend community resources, and coordinate care plans for youth with intensive behavioral, developmental, educational, or mental health needs. Many of these youth require residential placement—or would benefit from alternatives to residential placement—because their needs exceed what families can safely manage at home.

Maryland hospitals are already experiencing pediatric psychiatric overstays and boarding pressures. State and local behavioral health planning documents have identified the ongoing need to expand and strengthen the quality and availability of behavioral health services for children and youth. Yet in Prince George's County, the lack of adolescent psychiatric inpatient beds continues to create unnecessary hardship for families.

During LCT meetings, parents consistently reported the following barriers and impacts:

- **Jurisdictional Challenges** – When an adolescent bed becomes available in another Maryland county or in Washington, DC, they particularly face challenges related to transportation and coordination.
- **Deprioritized Admission** – At Children's National Hospital in Washington, DC, understandable, Prince George's County youth may be deprioritized in favor of DC residents when beds become available.
- **Parental Onsite Stays** – Some hospitals require caregivers to remain on site around the clock until a bed is located and transport is arranged.
- **Exhaustion** – Parents express significant emotional exhaustion and frustration during an already overwhelming crisis, especially when a child faces extended hospital boarding because adequate post-discharge support is not available.
- **Emotional and Financial Impacts** – Workplace tension, loss of leave, and financial strain is experienced when caregivers miss extended periods of work to remain with their hospitalized child

These and the systemic gaps place additional stress on families who are already navigating mental health crises. They also delay appropriate treatment for youth who urgently need specialized care.

Increasing inpatient capacity in Prince George's County will reduce psychiatric boarding, improve continuity of care, and better support families across the region.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge your support of SB 870..