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WRITTEN TESTIMONY

SB490: Maryland Medical Assistance Program - Step Therapy, Fail-First Protocols, and Prior Authorization - Prescription Drugs to Treat Serious Mental Illness

Senate Finance Committee | February 17, 2026

SUPPORT

Background: Senate Bill 490 would prohibit the Maryland Medical Assistance Program from applying a prior authorization requirement in certain circumstances to and from applying a step therapy or fail-first protocol for a prescription drug used to treat an adult enrollee's diagnosis of bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, major depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, or a medication-induced movement disorder associated with the treatment of serious mental illness.

Written Comments: The Baltimore Jewish Council represents The Associated: Jewish Federation of Baltimore and all of its agencies. This includes Jewish Community Services (JCS), which offers programs and services for people of all ages and backgrounds, helping them achieve their goals, enhance their wellbeing, and maximize their independence. JCS currently provides therapy and medication management to a large population of clients with both commercial and public insurance, including Medicaid patients.

“Step therapy or fail-first protocol” means a protocol established by a carrier that requires a prescription drug or sequence of prescription drugs to be used by an insured or enrollee before a prescription drug ordered by a prescriber is covered. Step therapy protocols can require patients to try less effective medications before more effective ones. Fail-first protocols and prior authorization requirements can delay treatment and increase stress and frustration for patients. Inappropriate use of step therapy protocols can lead to adverse reactions and delay necessary treatment. This can increase health care costs, especially for patients with rare diseases.

This bill would ensure that a prior authorization requirement, fail-first protocol, or step therapy protocol may not be imposed for a prescription drug used to treat a diagnosis of bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, major depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, or a medication-induced movement disorder associated with the treatment of a serious mental illness, protecting these individuals from prolonging their course of treatment with potential negative effects.

For these reasons, the Baltimore Jewish Councils asks for a favorable report on SB490.

The Baltimore Jewish Council, a coalition of central Maryland Jewish organizations and congregations, advocates at all levels of government, on a variety of social welfare, economic and religious concerns, to protect and promote the interests of the Associated Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore, its agencies and the Greater Baltimore Jewish community.