

**Senate Bill 490 – Maryland Medical Assistance Program – Step Therapy, Fail-First Protocols, and Prior Authorization – Prescription Drugs to Treat Serious Mental Illness**

**POSITION: Support**

February 17, 2026

Senate Finance Committee

The University of Maryland Medical System respectfully submits this letter of support for Senate Bill 490 – Maryland Medical Assistance Program - Step Therapy, Fail-First Protocols, and Prior Authorization – Prescription Drugs to Treat Serious Mental Illness. Senate Bill 490 (“SB 490”) proposes to reform utilization management practices for individuals enrolled in Medicaid with certain serious mental health conditions. Specifically, the bill would prohibit prior authorizations for a prescription drug used to treat an adult Medicaid enrollee’s diagnosis of bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, major depression, or post-traumatic stress disorder.

SB 490 would prohibit prior authorization, step therapy or fail-first protocol for a diagnosis of serious mental health conditions with the goal of reducing unnecessary delays in care. While the University of Maryland Medical System recognizes the importance of containing costs and ensuring appropriate use of health care resources, the current reliance on rigid fail-first protocols and burdensome pre-authorization processes too often limits access to effective care for our most vulnerable populations. When individuals with serious mental health conditions encounter delays, denials, or restrictions in accessing needed therapies, their conditions frequently worsen—leading to increased symptom severity, avoidable suffering, and, ultimately, higher downstream costs through more frequent hospitalizations, longer inpatient stays, and increased readmissions.

This bill is an important step in the right direction toward ensuring timely and equitable access to effective treatments, especially for Medicaid enrollees who already face disproportionate barriers to care. By streamlining utilization review and promoting appropriate clinical decision-making, SB 490 would help prevent unnecessary emergency department visits, reduce avoidable hospital utilization, and support more stable, community-based treatment outcomes.

For these reasons, the University of Maryland Medical System supports SB 490, and respectfully requests a *favorable* report on the bill.

For more information, please contact:

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