

**HB0808****Maryland Medical Assistance Program - Step Therapy, Fail-First Protocols, and Prior Authorization - Prescription Drugs to Treat Serious Mental Illness**

Health Committee

February 19, 2026

**Support**

**Catholic Charities of Baltimore supports HB0808**, which would prohibit applying a prior authorization, step therapy or fail-first protocol for prescription drugs utilized to treat bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, major depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, or a medication-induced movement disorder associated with the treatment of serious mental illness.

For more than a century, Catholic Charities has provided care and services to improve the lives of Marylanders in need. We accompany Marylanders as they age with dignity, support their pursuit of employment and career advancement, heal from trauma and addiction, achieve independence, prepare for educational success, and welcome immigrant neighbors into Maryland communities.

As the largest private provider of human services in Maryland, we provide behavioral health services to more than 3,500 patients through our Villa Maria Behavioral Health Services program. Through our work, we see firsthand how delays in accessing appropriate treatment due to prior authorization requirements and fail-first protocols can significantly worsen the mental health conditions of patients living with serious mental illness, many of whom are also experiencing homelessness. Although prior authorization is intended to manage prescription drug costs, approval wait times ranging from two to 14 days can create harmful and clinically inappropriate delays in care. These delays interrupt treatment continuity and are associated with higher relapse rates.

Research consistently demonstrates the consequences of these delays. A Johns Hopkins University study published on September 3, 2025, in *The American Journal of Medicine* found across 11 studies that prior authorization was associated with higher relapse rates and interruptions in treatment. Similarly, a survey of 1,000 practicing physicians conducted by the American Medical Association (AMA) found that 94% reported prior authorization always, often, or sometimes delays patients' access to necessary care (AMA, 2026). Step therapy, or fail-first protocols, further compounds these challenges by delaying access to evidence-based treatments and preventing clinicians from prescribing the most appropriate course of care based on an individual's medical history and clinical need.

Prohibiting the use of prior authorization, step therapy, and fail-first protocols for medications used to treat serious mental illness would ensure timely, uninterrupted care and reduce the risk of relapse for patients with serious mental health conditions, many of whom we serve.

**For these reasons, Catholic Charities of Baltimore urges the committee to issue a favorable report for HB0808.**

Submitted By: Madelin Martinez on behalf of Sarah Katvala, Advocacy Fellow and Dr. Taylor Scott, Chief Medical Officer, Catholic Charities Family Services