



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

Bill Sponsor: Delegate S. Johnson

Committee: Health and Government Operations

Organization Submitting: Maryland Legislative Coalition

Person Submitting: Jessica Gorski, Executive Committee

Position: FAVORABLE

Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Jessica Gorski, and I am submitting this testimony in strong support of HB0808 on behalf of the Maryland Legislative Coalition, a statewide network of grassroots organizations representing more than 30,000 Marylanders across every legislative district. Our mission is to advance legislation that strengthens healthcare access, public safety, education, environmental protection, and social justice—ensuring that every Marylander has the resources and stability needed to thrive.

HB0808 directly advances that mission by removing harmful barriers to timely, effective treatment for individuals living with serious mental illness.

This bill prohibits the Maryland Medical Assistance Program from imposing prior authorization, step therapy, or fail-first requirements on prescription drugs used to treat adults diagnosed with bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, major depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, or medication-induced movement disorders associated with treatment for serious mental illness. These reforms are targeted, evidence-based, and urgently needed.

Across Maryland, patients with serious mental health conditions routinely face delays in accessing the medications their providers deem medically necessary. Step therapy and fail-first protocols—designed for cost containment, not clinical appropriateness—can destabilize treatment, increase the risk of crisis, and undermine long-term recovery. For individuals managing complex psychiatric conditions, even short interruptions in medication can lead to hospitalization, loss of employment, homelessness, or involvement with the criminal justice system.

HB0808 ensures that Maryland’s Medicaid program does not impose administrative hurdles that jeopardize patient safety or interfere with clinical judgment. By eliminating these barriers, the bill strengthens the state’s ability to:

- Support continuity of care for individuals with serious mental illness,
- Reduce preventable hospitalizations and emergency interventions,
- Promote treatment adherence and long-term stability,
- Protect patients from being forced to “fail” on medications that are ineffective or harmful, and
- Empower clinicians to prescribe the most appropriate medication based on medical need—not insurer requirements.

These protections are especially critical for behavioral health patients, who are disproportionately harmed by treatment delays and medication disruptions. HB0808 recognizes that mental health care must be timely, individualized, and grounded in clinical expertise.

Importantly, this bill does not restrict the Maryland Medical Assistance Program from managing its formulary or ensuring responsible stewardship of public funds. Instead, it ensures that cost-containment strategies do not override medical necessity or compromise patient well-being.

Maryland has long been a national leader in strengthening behavioral health access and reducing barriers to care. HB0808 builds on that legacy by ensuring that individuals with serious mental illness receive the medications they need without unnecessary delay, risk, or administrative burden.

HB0808 aligns squarely with the mission of the Maryland Legislative Coalition. It protects vulnerable Marylanders, strengthens behavioral health outcomes, and ensures that treatment decisions remain where they belong—with patients and their healthcare providers.

We urge the Committee to support this compassionate, clinically sound legislation.

Thank you for your time and consideration. **We respectfully urge a FAVORABLE report on HB0808.**

Jessica Gorski
Executive Committee
Maryland Legislative Coalition

