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Testimony on HB1119

Health Occupations - Social Workers - Scopes of Practice

Health Committee

March 4, 2026

POSITION: OPPOSE

The Community Behavioral Health Association of Maryland (CBH) is the leading voice for community-based providers serving the mental health and addiction needs of vulnerable Marylanders. Our 95 members serve the majority of those who access care through the public behavioral health system. CBH members provide outpatient and residential treatment for mental health and addiction-related disorders, day programs, case management, Assertive Community Treatment (ACT), employment supports, and crisis intervention. On behalf of our members, we have significant concerns about HB1119.

HB1119 makes substantive alterations to the scope of practice for Maryland social workers with sweeping changes to statutory language. Relevant stakeholders were not meaningfully engaged in the drafting of HB1119, resulting in several proposed revisions that may hinder rather than improve social work practice and care in Maryland.

For example, HB1119 removes language that permits a licensed certified social worker-clinical (LCSW-C) to petition for emergency evaluation of individuals experiencing a psychiatric crisis, a necessary authority for advanced clinicians in crisis situations in schools, hospitals, and mobile crisis teams across the state. Removing this statutory language will reduce access to crisis care for individuals presenting high levels of need. HB1119 also deletes the express authority of social workers to provide counseling for alcohol and drug use and addictive behavior. This language was added to statute six years ago to clarify social worker scope of practice; removing it reintroduces the ambiguity this language was added to correct.

As drafted, CBH is concerned that HB1119 will drastically reduce the workforce available to respond to crisis situations and deliver substance use services, a step at odds with recent policy and statutory changes.

For these reasons, CBH respectfully urges an unfavorable report on HB1119. CBH and its members would welcome the opportunity to work collaboratively to address any concerns with social work practice to ensure the future of high-quality behavioral health services in Maryland.

For more information contact Sara Hairgrove, Assistant Director of Public Policy, at Sara@MDCBH.org.