

## **Testimony HB 1094**

**Meghan Crosby Budinger**

Good afternoon Madam Chair Bagnall and members of the committee. My name is Meghan Crosby Budinger. I am a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor and serve as the Program Director of Behavioral Health Integration in Pediatric Primary Care, or BHIPP, at the University of Maryland, School of Medicine.

I am here today in strong support of House Bill 1094.

Maryland is facing a critical behavioral health workforce shortage. The state needs an estimated 30,000 additional behavioral health workers to meet demand, and our youth are already feeling the impact. In 2021, nearly 46% of Maryland adolescents with depression received no care. The gaps are even more pronounced in rural areas like the Eastern Shore and Western Maryland, where only two of Maryland's 24 counties currently have an adequate number of behavioral health providers.

One way that BHIPP works to address this crisis is through our colocated internship program which places master's-level counseling and social work trainees in pediatric primary care practices where they provide essential services—including mental health screenings, brief intervention, and referral coordination—for youth in medically underserved communities. Our interns received a rigorous curriculum in evidence-based interventions and are supervised by licensed psychologists, counselors, and social workers. Since 2012, BHIPP interns have completed more than 13,200 behavioral health visits. Programs like ours help build the next generation of the behavioral health workforce, however, the longevity of models such as these are threatened by an over-reliance on fluctuating grant funding.

House Bill 1094 would allow insurance reimbursement for services provided by graduate-level clinical interns under supervision. This would strengthen the workforce pipeline, expand access to evidence-based care for youth, and help sustain training programs serving Maryland's most vulnerable communities, providing greater access to high quality care and ensuring that trainees are gaining access to evidence-based interventions.

For these reasons, I urge the committee to vote favorably on HB 1094. Thank you.