



Testimony on HB1119
Health Occupations - Social Workers - Scopes of Practice
Health Committee
March 4, 2026

POSITION: OPPOSE

The Affiliated Sante Group is a Maryland-based behavioral health and crisis support services provider located in 15 jurisdictions throughout the State of Maryland, Santé has provided behavioral health outpatient services since 1992 and critical behavioral health crisis response services since 1998. Our longstanding community behavioral health services have supported numerous individuals for over 30 years, with many of those services related to crisis events. Santé has 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.

We are deeply troubled by the downstream impact this legislation would have on Maryland's crisis response system and overall behavioral health infrastructure. Removing the authority of LCSW-Cs to petition for emergency evaluations (EPs) is counterproductive to the State's goal of reducing law enforcement involvement in behavioral health crises. Instead of diverting individuals from police contact, this change would require Mobile Response Teams (MRTs) and other crisis providers to call law enforcement to initiate EPs, thereby increasing unnecessary police involvement in situations best addressed by trained behavioral health clinicians.

Additionally, placing EP decision-making solely in the hands of law enforcement, professionals who are not clinically trained to conduct comprehensive behavioral health risk assessments, may reduce diversions from higher levels of care and inadvertently increase emergency room utilization. Delays in clinical evaluation and intervention could place clients at greater risk of harm and slow access to appropriate inpatient or crisis stabilization services. Therapists would become reliant on law enforcement to complete EPs for their own clients, limiting the inclusion of essential clinical information necessary to support inpatient placement decisions. This fragmentation of care undermines continuity and compromises clinical integrity.

Finally, this legislation would increase financial burdens by necessitating greater reliance on physicians, nurse practitioners, or other providers to fulfill functions currently performed by LCSW-Cs. It would also create a professional disparity between LCSW-Cs and LCPCs, intensifying workforce shortages as crisis and community-based programs compete for a smaller pool of qualified clinicians. At a time when Maryland is working to strengthen and expand its behavioral health workforce, this proposal would move the system in the opposite direction.

As drafted, Santé 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, Santé 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.

Respectfully,

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