



March 4, 2026

**House Health Committee
TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION**

HB 1119 - Health Occupations - Social Workers - Scopes of Practice

Behavioral Health System Baltimore (BHSB) is a nonprofit organization that serves as the local behavioral health authority (LBHA) for Baltimore City. BHSB works to increase access to a full range of quality behavioral health (mental health and substance use) services and advocates for innovative approaches to prevention, early intervention, treatment and recovery for individuals, families, and communities. Baltimore City represents nearly 35 percent of the public behavioral health system in Maryland, serving over 100,000 people with mental illness and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as “behavioral health”) annually.

Behavioral Health System Baltimore respectfully opposes HB 1119 - Health Occupations - Social Workers - Scopes of Practice. This legislation makes significant changes to social worker scope of practice whose implications are difficult to interpret. There are several concerning passages that may limit social worker duties and so the bill should be reconsidered.

Social workers are essential to the functioning of the public behavioral health system. Maryland faces a significant shortage of social workers and should be looking to identify flexibilities that could help expand the impact of the social worker workforce. Unfortunately, the revisions proposed in HB1119, may result in a more restricted or ambiguous scope of practice than current law.

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, BHSB worries that HB1119 could exacerbate Maryland’s workforce challenges. We would welcome a review of social worker scope of practice, but any change must be drafted with the full range of relevant stakeholders. **We urge the House Health Committee to give HB 1119 an unfavorable report.**

For more information, please contact BHSB Policy Director Dan Rabbitt at 443-401-6142