

THE COALITION TO PROTECT MARYLAND'S CHILDREN

Our Mission: To combine and amplify the power of organizations and citizens working together to keep children safe from abuse and neglect. We strive to secure budgetary and public policy resources to make meaningful and measurable improvements in safety, permanence, and wellbeing.



CPMC
COALITION TO PROTECT
MARYLAND'S CHILDREN

SB0870 - Maryland Department of Health - Adolescent Psychiatric Inpatient Beds - Reports on Capacity and Outcomes

House Health Committee

April 1, 2026

Position: SUPPORT

The Coalition to Protect Maryland's Children is a consortium of organizations and individuals formed in 1992 who are concerned about the care of Maryland's most vulnerable children and work together to educate and promote meaningful child welfare reform. **CPMC urges a favorable report on SB0870 - Maryland Department of Health - Adolescent Psychiatric Inpatient Beds - Reports on Capacity and Outcomes.**

SB0870, as currently amended, takes a modest but necessary step toward addressing a larger, longstanding problem in Maryland - the lack of a coherent and adequately resourced continuum of care for youth with high-acuity behavioral health needs. This bill would require the Maryland Department of Health to do something very basic - **report on the number and location of licensed of adolescent psychiatric inpatient beds by county** along with related metrics on emergency room boarding, hospital overstays, and barriers to capacity. The fact that this requires legislation should give us pause.

Right now, Maryland operates a real-time psychiatric bed registry to identify available placements but can't clearly answer basic questions like how many beds exist for adolescents, where they are located, and whether the beds are staffed and available. This matters because inpatient capacity isn't an isolated problem – it is the **top end of a fragmented continuum of care** with too few high-acuity residential placements; limited (or for boys 14+, nonexistent) step-down options; and inadequate crisis intervention and stabilization capacity. The consequences are made visible every day in the form of youth 'boarding' in emergency rooms and remaining in psychiatric inpatient units long past deemed ready for discharge. Moreover, the ill-equipped child welfare system has been increasingly tasked with responsibility for providing high intensity behavioral health care.

That transparency is an important first step because until the full picture is visible, the system will continue to treat these failures as isolated events rather than what they are - a structural shortage of appropriate placements for a **small but high-need group of youth.**

Effective policy responses depend on a shared understanding of the scope and location of need. Aligning resources, evaluating outcomes, or holding systems accountable for results are impossible without reliable, publicly reported data. At the same time, it is important to recognize the limits of this approach. Counting beds doesn't create them. If the data generated through this bill confirms ongoing shortages, further action will be required to expand and sustain appropriate capacity across the continuum of care.

While limited in scope, HB0870 establishes a necessary foundation for more informed and effective policy decisions regarding adolescent behavioral health services in Maryland. It is for these reasons that the **CPMC urges a favorable report on SB0870 - Maryland Department of Health - Adolescent Psychiatric Inpatient Beds - Reports on Capacity and Outcome.**¹

¹ Members of CPMC represented by this written testimony include the American Academy of Pediatrics - Maryland Chapter, Arrow Child & Family Ministries, Child Justice, Center for Hope, Citizens Review Board for Children, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA - Baltimore County), Everstand, The Family Tree, Maryland Association of Resources for Families and Youth (MARFY), Maryland Children's Alliance, Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MCASA), Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence (MNADV), the State Council on Child Abuse & Neglect (SCCAN), and individual members of the coalition.