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House Health Committee

February 23, 2026

HB0995

Position: SUPPORT

Dear Madam Chair Bagnall, Delegate Woods and Distinguished Members of the House Health Committee,

My name is Megan Kniffen, and I am a Licensed Certified Social Worker–Clinical (LCSW-C) and owner of a private psychotherapy practice in Maryland. I provide direct clinical services to individuals navigating trauma, depression, anxiety, life transitions, and other deeply personal challenges. I am submitting this testimony in strong support of HB0995 from the perspective of a practicing clinician who works with sensitive client information every day.

Artificial intelligence can be a valuable tool when used thoughtfully and with appropriate safeguards. In my own practice, I have used AI-assisted programs to support administrative tasks such as note organization and session planning. When applied carefully, these tools can enhance efficiency and reduce clinician burnout. However, these benefits must be weighed against the serious risks associated with handling highly sensitive client data.

As a clinical social worker, I routinely work with some of the most private and vulnerable information imaginable — trauma histories, mental health diagnoses, substance use treatment records, family conflict, immigration stressors, and crisis situations. Entering such information into open AI systems without clear regulatory guardrails raises significant concerns about confidentiality, data ownership, secondary data use, and long-term storage. Protecting client privacy is not optional; it is foundational to ethical clinical practice.

Equally important is the nature of therapy itself. Effective mental health treatment depends on empathy, clinical judgment, cultural humility, and relational trust. Healing happens within human relationships. While AI can generate language, it cannot assess suicide risk, interpret nonverbal cues, respond appropriately to a client in acute crisis, or apply nuanced clinical reasoning informed by years of training and supervised experience. It cannot replace professional discernment or ethical accountability.

Without guidelines, consumers may not understand when they are interacting with AI rather than a licensed mental health professional. They may unknowingly disclose protected health information. They may receive responses that lack clinical judgment, crisis intervention capacity, or cultural responsiveness. That presents risks not only to clients, but also to licensed professionals who are ethically and legally responsible for the services delivered under their care.

HB0995 does not prohibit innovation. Rather, it establishes necessary guardrails to ensure AI is used responsibly, ethically, and transparently in behavioral health settings. It supports the integration of technology in ways that enhance professional practice without replacing or undermining it.

As a private practice clinician, I strongly support responsible innovation — but innovation must not outpace consumer protection. Clear standards will protect Marylanders, preserve professional integrity, and ensure that emerging technologies strengthen rather than weaken the therapeutic relationship.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge a favorable report on HB0995.

Thank you for your consideration and for your continued commitment to protecting the public.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Megan M. Kniffen", followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Megan M. Kniffen, LCSW-C

Owner and Psychotherapist
