



March 10, 2026

**House Ways & Means Committee
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT**

HB 1060 - Primary and Secondary Schools - Petitions for Emergency Evaluation - Requirement for Tracking and Reporting and Study

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 opposes HB 1060 - Primary and Secondary Schools - Petitions for Emergency Evaluation - Requirement for Tracking and Reporting and Study. This bill would create a standardized process for tracking and reporting emergency petitions (EPs) in schools. This information is critical to know how this process is being used and to inform any needed policy changes to prevent racial disparities and best support the mental health and well-being of children.

EPs are used to involuntarily commit a child or adult to a hospital for psychiatric treatment. They play an important role when someone is a threat to themselves or others due to a behavioral health condition but should be used judiciously and as a last resort. Unfortunately, our schools sometimes use EPs not as a clinical intervention but more as disciplinary tool. EPs should only be used to address serious mental health challenges and not in response to poor behavior. The experience of being handcuffed and taken to the hospital against one’s will is traumatic and can have long-term negative impacts. The conflation of behavioral health treatment with punishment also can set a child up to oppose behavioral health treatment more generally.

HB1060 is a reasonable approach to improving transparency around school use of EPs. Maryland has limited publicly available data on the use of EPs, in schools or otherwise. This lack of standardized data on EPs and the nature of their use was a significant deficit identified by a 2021 workgroup on involuntary commitment. That workgroup recommended improving training on when an EP is appropriate and expanding publicly available data on EPs. Neither of these recommendations have been implemented, so HB1060 would help in moving them forward.

Understanding the prevalence and nature of EPs initiated at school is essential to make sure Maryland’s children are given the support they need to succeed. **BHSB urges the House Ways & Means Committee to support HB 1060.**

For more information, please contact BHSB Policy Director Dan Rabbitt at 443-401-6142 or daniel.rabbitt@bhsbaltimore.org