



February 19, 2020

The Honorable Delores G. Kelley
Senate Finance Committee
3 East, Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Support – SB 334: Health Insurance - Coverage for Mental Health Benefits and Substance Use Disorder Benefits - Treatment Criteria

Dear Chairman Kelley and Honorable Members of the Committee:

The Maryland Psychiatric Society (MPS) is a state medical organization whose physician members specialize in the diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of mental illnesses including substance use disorders. Formed more than sixty years ago to support the needs of psychiatrists and their patients, MPS works to ensure available, accessible and comprehensive quality mental health resources for all Maryland citizens; and strives through public education to dispel the stigma and discrimination of those suffering from a mental illness. As the district branch of the American Psychiatric Association covering the state of Maryland excluding the D.C. suburbs, MPS represents over 700 psychiatrists as well as physicians currently in psychiatric training.

MPS supports Senate Bill 334 (SB 334), which would require the Maryland Insurance Commissioner to ensure that carriers in the state demonstrate compliance with the federal Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act (MHPAEA). Patients with mental illness, substance use disorders, or the comorbidity of both mental illness and substance use disorder often face additional barriers to receiving adequate care than patients who seek treatment for somatic illnesses. SB 334 would address a part of that inequity by requiring carriers to submit a report on how they design and apply non-quantitative treatment limitations for mental health and/or substance use disorders treatment. Additionally, SB 334 authorizes the Insurance Commissioner to levy fines for MHPAEA non-compliance.

Ensuring access to quality evidence-based services to treat mental health and/or substance use disorders should be a priority for legislators, particularly at a time when our state is experiencing an ongoing suicide epidemic and opioid crisis. Even a small delay in coverage for these services can pose irreversible harm to individual patients and produce higher downstream costs to the health care and social service systems, such as inpatient hospitalizations, patient death or disability, and avoidable emergency room utilization and boarding.

As an organization that represents the front-line physicians treating patients with mental illness and/or substance use disorders, MPS urges the committee to provide a favorable report on SB 334. If you have any questions with regards to this testimony, please feel free to contact Thomas Tompsett Jr. at tommy.tompsett@mdlobbyist.com.

Respectfully submitted,
The Legislative Action Committee for the Maryland Psychiatric Society