

**Senate Bill 646 Alcohol and Drug Counseling – Alcohol and Drug Trainees –
Practice Through Telehealth**

Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

February 16, 2021

Position: SUPPORT

The Mental Health Association of Maryland is a nonprofit education and advocacy organization that brings together consumers, families, clinicians, advocates and concerned citizens for unified action in all aspects of mental health and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as behavioral health). **We appreciate the opportunity to provide this testimony in support of Senate Bill 646.**

SB 646 permits Alcohol and Drug Trainee (ADT) counselors to continue providing counseling via telehealth – while working under supervision for a licensed substance use disorder program – after the current public health emergency has been terminated.

Expanded use of telehealth – including an allowance for the provision of telehealth by ADTs – has been a critical component in Maryland’s effort to mitigate spread of the coronavirus. Increased flexibility in the delivery of these services has protected providers and patients from exposure to the virus, ensured continuity of care for Marylanders unable to access in-person treatment, and increased overall access to care. The service expansion has become a vital part of Maryland’s continuum of care and it must be preserved.

The ability of ADTs to provide telehealth services will be particularly important as Maryland works to address the serious behavioral health impact of COVID-19. Up to 40% of Marylanders have reported feeling anxious or depressed as a result of the pandemic and state crisis hotlines are receiving a startling increase in calls from individuals at risk for suicide. Maryland drug- and alcohol-related deaths jumped by more than 12% through the third quarter of 2020 as compared to the same period a year earlier, including a nearly 15% increase in opioid-related deaths.¹ In a survey from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, over 13% of respondents said they have started or increased their substance use to cope with stress from the pandemic.²

Telehealth is a critical tool in our efforts to meet an increasing demand for substance use treatment. For this reason, **MHAMD supports SB 646 and urges a favorable report.**

¹ <https://beforeitstoolate.maryland.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/34/2021/01/Third-Quarter-OOCC-Report-2020-FINAL.pdf>

² <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6932a1.htm>

For more information, please contact Dan Martin at (410) 978-8865