



January 27, 2021

**Senate Finance Committee
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT**

*SB56—Maryland Medical Assistance Program - Psychiatrist and Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner
Telemedicine Reimbursement - Sunset Termination*

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 77,000 people with mental illness and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as “behavioral health”) annually.**

Behavioral Health System Baltimore is pleased to support SB56—Maryland Medical Assistance Program - Psychiatrist and Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner Telemedicine Reimbursement - Sunset Termination. This bill requires that the Maryland Department of Health permanently provide coverage of and reimbursement for health care services that are appropriately delivered by a psychiatrist and psychiatric nurse practitioners providing Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) or mobile treatment services (MTS) by repealing the termination provisions.

In Baltimore City, many people in our communities who are living with a mental illness or substance use disorder do not have access to the treatment and support services they need to recover and lead productive, healthy lives because of the shortage of behavioral health medical professionals. Often, people who cannot access substance use or mental health disorder treatment services in the community end up having unnecessary interactions with police or admitted to hospital emergency departments, because they do not have other options.

An effective approach to addressing this need for better access to treatment through the PBHS is to strengthen and expand telehealth services. Telehealth is an important part of a health care delivery system to ensure that individuals receive care in the least restrictive, more cost-effective setting that is best situated to promote long-term recovery. Telehealth for ACT and mobile treatment services can lead to success in reaching several important goals:

- Expands access to behavioral health treatment in the communities that people live, in particular in underserved areas of the state
- Reduces unnecessary hospitalizations for people with behavioral health disorders
- Improves patient adherence with treatment plans and health outcomes through timely disease detection
- Enhances patient-choice and provides another behavioral health care delivery option along the continuum of care.

Telehealth expands access behavioral health treatment and improves care outcomes, makes it easier for patients to connect with their providers, and helps cut costs to patients and providers alike. **As such, BHSB urges the Senate Finance Committee to pass SB 56.**