



Statement of Maryland Rural Health Association

To the Finance Committee

February 23, 2021

Senate Bill 520 - Behavioral Health Services and Voluntary Placement Agreements - Children and Young Adults - Report Modifications

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman, Senator Klausmeier, and members of the Finance Committee, the Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA) is in SUPPORT of Senate Bill 520 - Behavioral Health Services and Voluntary Placement Agreements - Children and Young Adults - Report Modifications.

MRHA supports this legislation that would require an annual report on behavioral health services for children and young adults in the State and would include information relating to outpatient and substance-related disorders program services by children and young adults provided through telehealth. This legislation ensures that proper data is being collected that would characterize the necessity of behavioral health and substance use disorder delivered through telehealth to rural communities.

Rural Marylanders suffer from chronic lack of behavioral health and substance use disorder care, so it is imperative that these services are being delivered through telehealth during this pandemic.

MRHA's mission is to educate and advocate for the optimal health and wellness of rural communities and their residents. Membership is comprised of health departments, hospitals, community health centers, health professionals, and community members in rural Maryland.

And while Maryland is one of the richest states, there is great disparity in how wealth is distributed. The greatest portion of wealth resides around the Baltimore/Washington Region; while further away from the I-95 corridor, differences in the social and economic environment are very apparent.

MRHA supports this legislation and the attention to addressing lack of quality behavioral health and substance use disorder services. As stated above, rural Marylanders shoulder unique barriers to health, and this legislation would provide a data driven approach to understand and form a foundation to better achieve health equity.

MHRA believes this legislation is important to support our rural communities and we thank you for your consideration.

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