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February 16, 2021

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Delegate Shane Pendergrass, Chair
House Health and Government Operations Committee
6 Bladen Street
Room 241, House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: HB 132 - Health – Mental and Emotional Disorders – Consent (Mental Health Access Initiative)

Position: **OPPOSE**

Dear Chair Pendergrass:

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The Maryland Psychological Association represents over 1000 doctoral level psychologists throughout the state. **We oppose HB132, which would lower the “Age of Consent” for children in need of mental health treatment from the current age of 16 to 12.** Although the proposed legislation expresses the admirable intent of expanding mental health access for young people, it could result in unintended adverse consequences. Psychologists are frequently called upon to provide treatment for children showing signs of psychological distress and mental disorders. Most pre-teen and younger teen age children do not have the cognitive capacity to consent to such treatment without parental involvement, and it is not developmentally appropriate to expect them to be able to do so. Parental involvement is essential when working with young children, and such treatment cannot be effective without such involvement.

For these, and many other reasons, the Maryland Psychological Association asks for an **UNFAVORABLE** report on House Bill 132.

Thank you for considering our comments on House Bill 132. If we can be of any further assistance as the Senate Finance Committee considers this bill, please do not hesitate to contact the MPA Executive Director, Stefanie Reeves, MA, CAE at 410-992-4258 or exec@marylandpsychology.org.

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cc: Richard Bloch, Esq., Counsel for Maryland Psychological Association
Barbara Brocato & Dan Shattuck, MPA Government Affairs