

**House Bill 919 Maryland Insurance Commissioner – Specialty Mental Health Services and
Payment of Claims - Enforcement**

Health and Government Operations Committee

February 25, 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 House Bill 919.**

HB 919 authorizes the Maryland Insurance Commissioner to **enforce minimum performance standards** for the Administrative Services Organization (ASO) that is responsible for managing the delivery of public mental health and substance use disorder services.

In January 2020, the Maryland Department of Health transitioned administrative management of the public behavioral health system to a new vendor – Optum Maryland. To say the transition has been a challenge would be an understatement. Optum’s IT system failed immediately, and over a year of chaos and uncertainty have followed.

The Optum system is unable to perform even the most basic claims processing functions. Mental health and substance use treatment providers do not have the information they need to determine their financial position or their ability to make payroll. Optum has not provided clear and consistent communication or basic technical assistance support, leaving behavioral health providers mired in a system that requires duplication of effort and diversion of their attention away from clinical care.

This is a situation that would be untenable in normal times. It is particularly disconcerting at a time of skyrocketing demand for treatment. Maryland has managed many of these vendor transitions over the past 20 years. Never before has the process been so dysfunctional and disruptive.

As the pandemic wanes and the need for mental health and substance use treatment continues to rise, these services will be more important than ever. But if this situation continues unabated many community providers will find it difficult to carry on, and access to critical public behavioral health services will decrease even further

The additional enforcement mechanism provided by House Bill 919 is a critical component in our efforts to ensure Marylanders with mental health and substance use disorders are able to access care during this time of increasing demand. For this reason, **MHAMD supports this bill and urges a favorable report.**

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