

**HEALTH CARE FOR THE HOMELESS TESTIMONY
IN SUPPORT OF
HB 132 – Health – Mental and Emotional Disorders – Consent
(Mental Health Access Initiative)**

**House Health & Government Operations Committee
February 16, 2021**



Health Care for the Homeless supports HB 132, which specifies that any minor has the same capacity as an adult to consent to consultation, diagnosis, and treatment of a mental or emotional disorder by a health care provider or a clinic.

Health Care for the Homeless has fully supported efforts in the past to ensure that minors have the capacity to consent to medical treatment and health care. Therefore, we fully support this commonsense extension. The bill affirms that a health care provider may involve a parent, guardian or custodian unless that disclosure will lead to harm to the minor or deter the minor from seeking care.

As Maryland's leading provider of integrated health services and supportive housing for individuals and families experiencing homelessness, we serve the needs of the most vulnerable and underserved populations—including homeless youth. For reasons ranging from rejection due to sexual orientation, gender identity, pregnancy, or disability, to exiting the foster care or juvenile justice systems without skills or resources needed to live independently, these individuals are left without stable housing and the support of a parent or legal guardian. As a result, youth experiencing homelessness are at a disproportionate risk for suicide, sex trafficking, delinquency, crime victimization, and health problems, including behavioral health problems.

Youth experiencing homelessness already face unique and oftentimes insurmountable barriers to basic health care. This bill will remove one more potential barrier and allow a trained mental health provider to assess the child and provide immediate assistance. It is important to note that the full range of behavioral health treatment, including both mental health and substance use disorders, are critical for youth to be able to access.

Therefore, Health Care for the Homeless respectfully requests a favorable report on this bill.

Health Care for the Homeless is Maryland's leading provider of integrated health services and supportive housing for individuals and families experiencing homelessness. We work to prevent and end homelessness for vulnerable individuals and families by providing quality, integrated health care and promoting access to affordable housing and sustainable incomes through direct service, advocacy, and community engagement. We deliver integrated medical care, mental health services, state-certified addiction treatment, dental care, social services, and housing support services for over 10,000 Marylanders annually at sites in Baltimore City and Baltimore County. For more information, visit www.hchmd.org.