



**Testimony before the House Health and Government Operations Committee**

**\*\*Support\*\***

**SB 41–**

**Health – Mental and Emotional Disorders – Consent (Mental Health Access Initiative)**

**March 23, 2021**

Maryland’s Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW-MD), which represents professional social workers across the state, supports SB 41 – Health – Mental and Emotional Disorders – Consent (Mental Health Access Initiative).

Social workers provide more mental health services in our country than any other profession and work in multiple settings supporting youth, including schools, hospitals and inpatient facilities, private practices, and community-based outpatient programs. This past year has been remarkable for the challenges and stresses that children and youth have faced as we have struggled with the health and social aspects of COVID 19. We anticipate that even after the present emergency, that the increased need of mental health services for youth will continue.

While we know that the involvement of parents and caregivers is important when addressing the mental health needs of minors, we also know that this is not always possible; and in some cases, may be of harm to the minor. We also know that the current minimum age requirement (16 years old) is not consistent with Maryland’s minor consent law for accessing substance use disorder services, which has no minimum age. We understand the apprehension that many may have in lowering the age of consent for mental health services from 16 to 12, but are not aware of any negative consequences from the substance use disorder services consent law, including minors who may in fact be obtaining mental health services for a substance use disorder or co-occurring disorder. In fact, this discrepancy between the two sets of services is not consistent with current practice of integrated behavioral health services.

We support SB 41, which in turn, supports the mental health needs of minors in Maryland.

**We ask that you give a favorable report on SB 41.**

Respectfully,

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