



February 19, 2021

The Honorable Shane E. Pendergrass
House Health & Government Operations Committee
Room 241, House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

&

The Honorable Maggie McIntosh
House Appropriations Committee
Room 121, House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: Support – HB 872: Sheila E. Hixson Behavioral Health Services Matching Grant Program for Service Members and Veterans – Establishment

Dear Chairman Pendergrass, Chairman McIntosh, and Honorable Members of the Committees:

The Maryland Psychiatric Society (MPS) and the Washington Psychiatric Society (WPS) are state medical organizations whose physician members specialize in diagnosing, treating, and preventing mental illnesses, including substance use disorders. Formed more than sixty-five years ago to support the needs of psychiatrists and their patients, both organizations work to ensure available, accessible, and comprehensive quality mental health resources for all Maryland citizens; and strives through public education to dispel the stigma and discrimination of those suffering from a mental illness. As the district branches of the American Psychiatric Association covering the state of Maryland, MPS and WPS represent over 1000 psychiatrists and physicians currently in psychiatric training.

MPS and WPS support House Bill 872: Sheila E. Hixson Behavioral Health Services Matching Grant Program for Service Members and Veterans – Establishment (HB 872). The United States has been actively involved in military conflicts for almost two decades with many United States military personnel serving multiple deployments to places such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and Africa. Deployments of this nature are extremely stressful situations as modern-day combat has become much more non-conventional. Rates of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and other psychiatric illnesses are extremely high with our military veterans. Unfortunately, suicide amongst active-duty soldiers and veterans has become all too commonplace. The United States Department of Veterans Affairs and the United States military's individual branches are struggling to provide mental health care to both veterans and soldiers alike. Through bills such as HB 872, Maryland is taking thoughtful steps in assisting veterans and their families in healing.



**Washington
Psychiatric Society**

HB 872, if codified, will expand community behavioral health programs for veterans by awarding competitive matching grants to local nonprofit organizations that provide such services. MPS and WPS believe that connecting more military personnel and veterans to meaningful mental health services and potentially reducing fatalities due to overdose and suicide in the military community are sound public policies, so MPS and WPS ask the committee for a favorable report.

If you have any questions with regard to this testimony, please feel free to contact Thomas Tompsett Jr. at tommy.tompsett@mdlobbyist.com.

Respectfully submitted,
Joint Legislative Action Committee
Maryland Psychiatric Society and the Washington Psychiatric Society