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**Senate Bill 56 Maryland Medical Assistance Program – Psychiatrist and Psychiatric Nurse
Practitioner Telemedicine Reimbursement – Sunset Termination**

Finance Committee

January 27, 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, mental illness, and substance use. We appreciate this opportunity to present this testimony in support of Senate Bill 56.

SB 56 removes the sunset on a provision of law allowing psychiatrists and psychiatric nurse practitioners to participate on Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) teams remotely via telehealth. ACT is an evidence-based practice that improves outcomes for people with serious mental illness who are at risk of psychiatric crisis and hospitalization.

Maryland has worked for years to address an increasing demand for mental health and substance use services that has been exacerbated by a persistent behavioral health workforce shortage. The coronavirus pandemic is making matters even worse. Isolation, loss of income and grief resulting from the loss of a loved one – not to mention the threat of contracting the virus – are all having a profound effect on our mental health. Up to 40% of Marylanders have reported feeling anxious or depressed as a result of the pandemic and state crisis hotlines are receiving a startling increase in calls from individuals at risk for suicide. Drug-and-alcohol-related deaths jumped by more than 18% in the second quarter of 2020 as compared to the same period a year earlier, including a 30% increase in opioid-related deaths.

In order to meet this increasing demand, we must ensure our community providers have the tools necessary to deliver care as broadly as possible to those in need. Telehealth and ACT are two of those tools, and we must ensure there are no barriers to their availability.

For these reasons, MHAMD supports SB 56 and urges a favorable report.

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