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**SB 398 - Out - of - State Health Care Practitioners - Provision of Behavioral Health Services via Telehealth -
Authorization**

Position: Favorable

March 3, 2022

Keiffer J. Mitchell, Jr., Chief Legislative Officer

Jake Whitaker, Deputy Legislative Officer

Dear Chair Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Committee,

Senate Bill (SB) 398 increases the number of health care practitioners available to deliver behavioral health services to patients in Maryland. Licensed out-of-state health care practitioners, who are in good standing with their state licensing authority and adhere to Maryland laws governing practice standards, would be permitted to deliver behavioral health services via telehealth to Maryland patients.

Several Maryland health occupations boards have already joined interstate compacts, including the Board of Physicians, Board of Nursing, and Board of Professional Counselors and Therapists. This bill is aimed at providing Maryland patients with access to out-of-state providers whose respective out-of-state licensing entity has chosen not to participate in an interstate compact. For example, neighboring states like Virginia and Pennsylvania are not members of the Counseling Compact. SB 398 will allow Maryland patients to receive behavioral health services from counselors in states like Virginia and Pennsylvania whose respective licensing authorities are not currently participating in the Counseling Compact.

SB 398 will improve patient access to health care practitioners in Maryland communities that are experiencing behavioral health practitioner shortages. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the demand for behavioral health services via telehealth has only increased. The COVID-19 pandemic created additional challenges for individuals with substance use disorders and increased the need for expanding access to mental health and substance use disorder treatment services. Overdose deaths in Maryland and across the United States have increased since the beginning of the pandemic. Increasing the number of available health care practitioners is a critical step in ensuring that Maryland will be poised to serve the mental health and substance use disorder treatment needs of Marylanders moving forward.

Since taking office, Governor Hogan and Lieutenant Governor Rutherford have remained committed to addressing the heroin and opioid epidemic, including expanding access to critical behavioral health and substance use disorder treatment services. SB 398 is another important step in eliminating barriers to behavioral health services in Maryland.

For these reasons, we respectfully request a favorable report on SB 398.

