

**Senate Bill 440 – Commission to Study the Health Care Workforce Crisis in Maryland -
Establishment**

Health and Government Operations Committee

March 24, 2022

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 testimony in support of Senate Bill 440.

SB 440 establishes a commission to examine the health care workforce shortage in Maryland and make recommendations to address both immediate and future needs.

The Health Resources and Services Administration designates geographic areas, population groups, and health care facilities with a shortage of health professionals as Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs). Maryland currently has 51 primary care HPSAs, 43 dental health HPSAs, and 48 mental health HPSAs.¹ At present, the entirety of 16 counties in Maryland qualify as a mental health HPSA.² Before the COVID-19 pandemic, projections showed that by 2025 the mental health workforce shortage would be significantly worse, with a nationwide shortage of approximately 250,510 full-time employees.³

The impact of the workforce shortage cannot be understated. Studies estimate nearly 83 million Americans diagnosed with anxiety or depression could not access counseling services in 2020. Virginia stopped admissions to 5 of the 8 state mental health hospitals in July of 2021 due to significant staff shortages.⁴ In Maryland's children's behavioral health system, 78% of Outpatient Mental Health Clinics, 83% of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Programs, and 50% of Target Case Management programs report staff vacancies resulting in reduced service use over the past 2 years.⁵

The health care workforce shortage has caused residents to struggle to access services, long waiting lists and service delays, and overworked mental health professionals. States and professional organizations throughout the United States are working to address shortages, and Maryland cannot afford to leave shortages unaddressed. For these reasons, MHAMD supports SB 440 and urges a favorable report.

¹Health Resources & Services Administration, <https://data.hrsa.gov/tools/shortage-area/hpsa-find>

²Rural Health Information Hub, <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/charts/7?state=MD>

³Behavioral Health and Economics Network, <https://www.bhecon.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/BHECON-Behavioral-Health-Workforce-Fact-Sheet-2018.pdf>

⁴The Nation's Health, <https://www.thenationshealth.org/content/51/10/1.3>

⁵Community Behavioral Health Association of Maryland, <http://mdcbh.org/files/manual/169/Child%20Utilization%20-%20Sept%202021.pdf>