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February 8, 2023

To: The Senate Budget and Tax Committee

From: Adventist HealthCare

Re: SB283 Mental Health – Workforce Development – Fund Established

**POSITION: SUPPORT**

Our Behavioral Health workforce is in a crisis. The need and demand for care has never been greater. This is in part due to work supported by this legislature that has raised awareness of mental health issues and expanded access to mental health services. These gains are significant but will not be sustainable if we do not have an adequate pipeline of mental health professionals to care for our communities.

Adventist HealthCare (AHC) is the second largest provider of behavioral health care in Maryland. With 117 inpatient beds at Shady Grove Medical Center, a robust outpatient clinic offering in-person and virtual visits, and the Lourie Center a national leader in children’s mental and emotional health, AHC is committed to expanding access to mental health care. Currently, the biggest challenge we face is a lack of available providers. AHC currently has an average vacancy rate of 22% for behavioral health nurses and 26% for physicians. The challenge is even greater in the field of early childhood mental health. This is a systemic issue and will take a robust strategy to address.

There are strategies for growing the behavioral health workforce – stipends and scholarships, enhanced training programs, loan repayment, paid internships, etc. The question, however, is how much funding do we put into these different initiatives and how do we target efforts to ensure we are properly resourcing *all* behavioral health professionals and paraprofessionals? **SB 283 is the answer.** The bill establishes a *Behavioral Health Workforce Investment Fund* to reimburse for costs associated with educating, training, certifying, recruiting, placing, and retaining behavioral health professionals and paraprofessionals.

AHC is pursuing multiple strategies to recruit and retain our workforce such as increasing compensation and offering loan forgiveness. We are also developing training programs to increase the supply of clinical support employees. But we cannot do it alone. Addressing this issue will take a comprehensive strategy as outlined in this bill.

For these reasons Adventist HealthCare supports SB283 and encourages the committee to give a **favorable report.**

