



Senate Bill 283 Mental Health – Workforce Development – Fund Established
Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
February 8, 2023
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT

Shepherd's Table is a social services organization that provides hot, nutritious meals, a free eye clinic, clothing, and other social services primarily to the unhoused community in the Montgomery County area. Many of our clients have experienced the trauma of unstable housing or food insecurity and rarely have access to the necessary behavioral health care that could assist them through such a difficult stage of life. Overcoming homelessness and hunger becomes even more difficult when it is exacerbated by mental health challenges, just as physical health challenges.

Maryland is in the midst of a behavioral health workforce crisis. Federal data¹ released just this month found that Maryland has **63 federally designated mental health professional shortage areas** (HPSAs)², including 11 entire counties. These shortage areas, in which less than 20% of residents are meeting their mental health needs, impact over 1.7 million Marylanders. Another indicator found that **17 of Maryland's 24 jurisdictions come in below the national average** (350:1) in terms of population to mental health providers, with a considerably lower number.³ In Montgomery County, our Mobile Crisis Teams are so understaffed that

This is unsustainable. There are simply not enough behavioral health professionals to meet the mental health and substance use needs of all Marylanders.

There are many positive ideas and 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 we put into these different initiatives, and how do

¹ <https://data.hrsa.gov/Default/GenerateHPSAQuarterlyReport>

² A HPSA is a geographic area, population group, or health care facility that has been designated by the US Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) as having a shortage of health professionals in one of three categories – primary care, dental health, and mental health

³ <https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/explore-health-rankings/maryland?year=2022&measure=Mental+Health+Providers&tab=1>

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 costs associated with educating, training, certifying, recruiting, placing, and retaining behavioral health professionals and paraprofessionals. Funding is left discretionary initially to allow for a required workforce needs assessment that will (1) determine the immediate, intermediate, and long-term unmet need and capacity of Maryland's behavioral health workforce; (2) calculate the total number of behavioral health professionals and paraprofessionals needed over the next five years, ten years, and 20 years; and (3) make very specific findings and recommendations regarding the types of workforce assistance programs and funding necessary to meet the need across all sectors of the behavioral health workforce.

When we asked our clients if they could change one thing about the homelessness continuum of care, the answer was resounding: mental health care. Therapists are hard to come by, social workers are overburdened and burnt out, and crisis teams are severely understaffed in Montgomery County. Maryland needs more mental health support, especially for our community experiencing homelessness. Investing in the workforce that keeps us safe and healthy is extremely important for Shepherd's Table and our clients.

This bill will expand and stabilize Maryland's behavioral health workforce. **For these reasons, Shepherd's Table urges this committee to pass SB 283.**