

**Testimony Before the Senate Finance Committee
February 15, 2024**

**Senate Bill 403: Hospitals and Related Institutions –
Residential Treatment Centers – Accreditation**

**** Support ****

The National Association of Social Workers – Maryland Chapter is a professional organization representing over 3,000 social workers statewide. We urge your support Senate Bill 403: Hospitals and Related Institutions – Residential Treatment Centers – Accreditation, a bill intended to simply expand options for accreditation to include the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities or the Council on Accreditation. The intent of the bill is to ease the opening of residential treatment beds without compromising quality or safety.

Residential treatment centers are health care facilities that provide intensive behavioral health services in a therapeutic, supportive and safe milieu for children and more typically teens. Over the last decade Maryland has lost hundreds of residential treatment beds as well as therapeutic group homes - entire programs have closed. Some closures have been the result of congregate care falling into disfavor, some for financial reasons, and others a decrease in need as a result of expanded access to in-home services for children with behavioral health needs.

However, the result has been an ever increasing crisis for children and youth in need of high intensity therapeutic care. As many as 20% or more of new entries into the state's Out of Home Placement (foster care) program are a group of predominantly older children with significant behavioral health needs and/or disabilities whose caregivers are unable or unwilling to continue providing care and surrender them instead to the local department of social services. While child welfare's mission is to provide for children who have been maltreated, over the years DHS has become the default provider for high intensity behavioral health care as well as becoming responsible for housing youth who once came under the purview of Juvenile Services.

We have all heard the horror stories of children left on overstay in hospitals on psychiatric units, the result of an insufficient capacity for placement options post-discharge. Not as well-known is the phenomenon of 'hoteling' children. For the past five years local departments of social services have been forced to 'place' children and youth in hotels for lack of any other options, supervised by an aide and fed with restaurant food at a cost to taxpayers of roughly \$30,000 to \$60,000 per month for each child. There may be as many as 50 at any given time, and some stay for months.

SB406 is simply one small step to ease approval for providers interested in opening sorely needed residential treatment centers without sacrificing quality or safety. The bill simply

expands options for the accrediting body required for approval, a no-brainer for support. We ask that you give a favorable report on SB 371.

Respectfully,

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