March 7, 2018

To: The Honorable Thomas M. Middleton, Chairman
    Senate Finance Committee

From: Nicole Stallings, Vice President, Policy & Data Analytics
     Brian Frazee, Director of Government Relations
     Maryland Hospital Association

Re Senate Bill 975 – Task Force to Study Drug Addiction as a Chronic Disease

Dear Chairman Middleton:

On behalf of the Maryland Hospital Association's (MHA) 64 member hospitals and health systems, we appreciate the opportunity to comment on SB 975, a bill that would establish a task force to study drug addiction as a chronic disease.

While Maryland's hospitals support the underlying intent of this legislation – to better inform stakeholders about the nature of drug addiction – the accepted clinical position is, and has been for many years, that drug addiction is a chronic disease. With this recognition, health care providers work to treat substance use disorder patients for the full course of their disease, from early-detection screenings to short-term intervention, to long-term, community-based services.

At a time when our state is in the throes of a deadly opioid crisis, all available resources should be dedicated to combating the problem at hand, namely that hundreds of Marylanders are dying each year due to substance use disorders. These Marylanders could be better served if the state's best and brightest clinicians, policymakers, and other stakeholders focused instead on opportunities to support the widespread adoption of evidence-based practices such as screening and providing naloxone to those treated for an overdose, address gaps in essential crisis services and bolster a depleted workforce.

These core components of a comprehensive, collaborative solution to the state's ongoing behavioral health crisis are among the five key recommendations in MHA's *Roadmap to an Essential, Comprehensive System of Behavioral Health Care for Maryland.*

We look forward to working together to deliver an effective, essential behavioral health treatment system for Maryland.