



Maryland  
Hospital Association

**House Bill 783-Task Force to Study Behavioral and Mental Health in Maryland**  
**Position: *Support***

**Bill Summary**

HB 783 establishes a Task Force to Study Behavioral and Mental Health in Maryland. The legislation also requires the task force study and make recommendations and report its findings to the Governor and certain committees of the General Assembly on or before December 1, 2020.

**MHA Position**

There is a crisis in our state, faced by an estimated one in five Marylanders: mental health and substance use disorders. Maryland's hospitals — primarily their emergency departments — are on the front lines of this crisis.

All too often people suffering from substance use and/or mental health disorders are unable to access effective treatment in the proper setting due to a lack of community resources and the effects of a shortage of behavioral health care workers.

Maryland's hospitals serve as a safety net in these cases because people with severe mental illnesses or in psychiatric crisis — often fueled by opioid addiction — repeatedly seek help in hospital emergency departments. Addressing this issue has been a key priority for the Maryland Hospital Association (MHA) for several years, and we established our own Behavioral Health Task Force to identify and support efforts aimed at strengthening our state's behavioral health care continuum.

In 2017, MHA's Behavioral Health Task Force Roadmap for an Essential, Comprehensive System of Behavioral Health Care for Maryland reported that, from 2013 to 2016, emergency department visits by people with behavioral health needs jumped by 18.5 percent, while all other emergency department visits dropped by more than 8 percent.

Maryland's hospitals know that additional study is needed and believe the task force established under HB 783 will help ensure coordination across stakeholders to address this crisis.

How Maryland's health and policy leaders respond to this challenge will determine whether health care providers can continue to deliver efficient, effective, high-quality care.

HB 783 builds upon the state's long-standing support for behavioral and mental health care, including the leadership of Gov. Larry Hogan, who was the first governor in the country to declare a full state of emergency over the scourge of opioids. He and Lt. Gov. Boyd Rutherford also demonstrated the importance of this issue by establishing the Heroin and Opioid Emergency Task Force and a separate Inter-Agency Coordinating Council — bringing needed attention and resources.

Maryland's hospitals also greatly appreciate the General Assembly's work to address behavioral and mental health care, in particular the passage of the HOPE & Treatment Act of 2017.

We have made significant advances as a result of these and other efforts, but we know much more work. The task force established under HB 783 has the potential to build upon these important gains.

Under Maryland's new Total Cost of Care agreement with the federal government, Maryland's hospitals are working to lower costs and improve population health. In addition to treating illness and injury, hospitals are reaching out beyond their four walls to keep people well and improve the health of the communities they serve. The result: hospitals are taking care of the whole person, empowering patients and families, coordinating care among different providers, and addressing social factors that influence people's health, including behavioral and mental health.

For these reasons, we urge a *favorable report* for HB 783.