



Maryland
Hospital Association

January 27, 2021

To: The Honorable Shane E. Pendergrass, Chair, House Health & Government Operations Committee

Re: Letter of Support- House Bill 191 - Maryland Medical Assistance Program - Psychiatrist and Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner Telemedicine Reimbursement - Sunset Termination

Dear Chair Pendergrass:

On behalf of the Maryland Hospital Association's (MHA) 60 member hospitals and health systems, we appreciate the opportunity to comment on House Bill 191. A robust telehealth network should be an integral part of the state's effort to address health care workforce shortages and ensure access to care. Telehealth encompasses a broad variety of technologies that deliver virtual health and education services—connecting providers and patients remotely. In recent years, more payers, health care providers, and patients found telehealth expanded their access to health care easily and efficiently. Telehealth also can help providers care for the estimated 1.5 million Marylanders with mental health or substance use disorders.

Passed by the Senate Finance Committee in 2018, this legislation improved care delivery and supportive services to some of Maryland's most vulnerable citizens: those living with psychological conditions requiring extensive care. The Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) model is designed to aggregate professionals in primary care, behavioral care, vocational assistance, and other basic services into a cohesive team that will meet and deliver services where people live.

Each ACT team is required to include a psychiatrist, who makes house calls. If a team's psychiatrist leaves, the entire team's status could be jeopardized if there isn't another psychiatrist available to step in immediately. Existing patients would be denied care. Maryland has a shortage of behavioral health care providers, including psychiatrists for clinics where they see patients. If patients had access to telehealth when in crisis, you could remove one more barrier to care. We fully recommend this law remains intact, and the sunset requirement be removed.

We ask the committee's *favorable report* on House Bill 191.

For more information, please contact:
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