November 26, 2018

Governor Lawrence J. Hogan, Jr.

100 State Circle

Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Governor Hogan,

Congratulations on your re-election! The Children’s Behavioral Health Coalition looks forward to working with you and your Administration to improve the lives of Maryland children and youth with mental health and substance use disorders.

In Maryland, the behavioral health systems of care for adults and children are as unique as the populations they serve. However, there is a population of individuals that does not fit neatly into either system, and as a result they have limited access to treatment and resources for their behavioral health illnesses while remaining at high risk. Transition age youth (TAY) are individuals between the ages of 18-26 who mature into the adult system but may need to continue within the rehabilitative framework of a youth or young adult behavioral health model to include broad diagnoses for services.

Transitioning from adolescence into adulthood can be challenging for young adults with behavioral health needs. TAY-specific programs prepare them for independent living by providing supervised housing and wraparound services, including medication management, counseling, coordination of services, supported education and employment, peer support, and training in life skills. However, unless TAY meet limited, adult-oriented diagnostic criteria for more severe mental illnesses like Schizophrenia and Bipolar Disorder, they are ineligible for rehabilitation services and are at risk for homelessness, substance misuse, trauma, and severe social impairment. An expansion of the diagnostic criteria similar to what is approved currently for children and youth through Beacon Health Options is essential to providing more TAY with access to appropriate supports, services and treatment options like rehabilitation and recovery services.

Furthermore, an increase in funding focused on the needs of this population would do much to address two major components of the 2017 Maryland Children’s Cabinet Three-Year Plan – reducing youth homelessness and improving outcomes for disconnected youth. The report states that “92,000 youth age 16-24 are neither working or in school” and suggests that “transition-age youth services for young adults with mental health needs include supported employment and in some cases, supported education.” Furthermore, it recognizes youth homelessness as a “historically unfunded or underfunded” population. The plan calls for targeting “vulnerable homeless youth who are not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian and who are under the age of 25,” and clearly states that these “unaccompanied homeless youth have unique needs that cannot be addressed by the same housing and supportive services offered to adults.”

The Children’s Behavioral Health Coalition is committed to addressing the unmet needs of this uniquely vulnerable population. We urge an expansion of the diagnostic criteria referenced above so they can access Medicaid funding to ensure these young adults with behavioral health needs have access to the services necessary to facilitate an early intervention and recovery.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to your response. If you have any questions, please contact Irnande Altema at 443-901-1550 x206 or ialtema@mhamd.org.

Sincerely,

The Undersigned Organizations of the Children’s Behavioral Health Coalition

cc: David Brinkley, Secretary of Budget and Management

 Dr. Barbara Bazron, Deputy Secretary and Executive Director of Behavioral Health

Administration

 Jaclin Warner Wiggins, Acting Executive Director of the Governor’s Office for Children