

MARYLAND PSYCHIATRIC SOCIETY



March 30, 2020

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The Honorable Lawrence Hogan
Governor of Maryland
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Governor Hogan,

The Maryland Psychiatric Society (MPS) is a state medical organization whose physician members specialize in the diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of mental illnesses including substance use disorders. Formed more than sixty years ago to support the needs of psychiatrists and their patients, MPS works to ensure available, accessible and comprehensive quality mental health resources for all Maryland citizens. We strive through public education to dispel the stigma and discrimination of those suffering from a mental illness. As the Maryland district branch of the American Psychiatric Association, MPS represents over 700 psychiatrists, as well as physicians currently in psychiatric training.

Thank you for your administration's leadership as our state grapples with the spread of COVID-19. We are gravely concerned about the conditions our members are witnessing while treating patients in our state's correctional facilities. These facilities are already under tremendous stress given the workforce shortage of behavioral health and custody staff; these shortages are now magnified by the potential spread of COVID-19. As of this date, our members report that facilities have not provided their departments with personal protective equipment, nor have our members received instructions on how to triage patients needing psychiatric care in a COVID-19 positive facility.

We urge you to require correctional facilities to appropriately equip their staff and produce contingency plans for how to ensure continuity of care if an outbreak occurs. Where appropriate, people need to be released to allow for single cell housing and appropriate "distancing." Releases and personal protective equipment are the only things that will address this. Also, arrangements need to be made to hospitalize severely ill prisoners outside the system.

The provision of adequate mental health care in jails and prisons remains as important now as it was before we faced the threat of COVID-19. The effective delivery of mental health services in correctional settings requires a balance and a mutually beneficial and effective partnership between security and treatment needs, and we urge you to help our members continue to deliver adequate care for patients.

Again, we thank you for your leadership during this time of uncertainty and crisis and ask you to act quickly on this urgent concern. Please contact the MPS office with any questions at 410.625.0232 or mps@mdpsych.org.

Sincerely

Marsden McGuire, M.D., President
Maryland Psychiatric Society, Inc.