



October 24, 2024

The Honorable Guy Guzzone
Chair, Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
3 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401-1991

The Honorable Pamela Beidle
Chair, 3 East Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Ben Barnes
Chair, House Appropriations Committee
121 House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401-1991

The Honorable Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk
Chair, House Health and Government Operations Committee
240 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: SB0283/CH0286, HB0418/CH0287 (2), 2023 - Mental Health - Workforce Development - Fund Established (Behavioral Health Workforce Assessment Report) (MSAR #14718)

Dear Chairs Guzzone, Beidle, Barnes, and Pena-Melnyk,

Please find attached the Behavioral Health Workforce Assessment Report and Executive Summary required under *SB0283/CH0286, HB0418/CH0287 (2), 2023 - Mental Health - Workforce Development - Fund Established*. The bill required the Maryland Health Care Commission (MHCC) to conduct a comprehensive behavioral health workforce needs assessment in coordination with the Behavioral Health Administration, the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC), the Maryland Department of Labor (MDL), and other interested stakeholders. The assessment report was completed by Trailhead Strategies, a consulting firm focused on assisting state and local governments in developing solutions to behavioral health workforce challenges.

The assessment report is a comprehensive study on the behavioral health workforce needs now and in 2030. The report estimates the deficit in the workforce, identifies options for increasing compensation, expanding training opportunities, and retaining the current and newly trained behavioral health professionals. The specific charges to MHCC in developing the report were to (1) determine the unmet need and capacity of the behavioral health workforce in the State; (2) calculate the total number of additional behavioral health professionals and paraprofessionals needed over specified timeframes; (3) make findings and recommendations regarding the types of training,

education, and tuition assistance programs necessary to certify, recruit, place, supervise, and retain those additional behavioral health professionals and paraprofessionals; and (4) recommend an initial allocation to the fund.

The report presents a recommendation on financing the mental health investment fund from public, private, and philanthropic sources and six specific recommendations on the training, education, and financial assistance necessary to certify, recruit, place, supervise, and retain those additional behavioral health professionals and paraprofessionals.

This report was carefully reviewed by the MHCC at the October Commission meeting. Commissioners agreed that the first priority of any behavioral health initiative should be elevating compensation levels for all categories of behavioral health professionals. MHCC Commissioners were especially disturbed by the assessment report finding that many behavioral health paraprofessionals, clinical social workers, and mid-level behavioral health professionals do not earn a living wage, which in the Baltimore metro area would total \$49,940 for a single person and \$89,090 for an adult and one child.¹ Absent adequate compensation the industry would continue to face significant employee retention challenges, which the report found is already a significant challenge for retaining the current work force.

We appreciate your consideration. If you have any questions or if we may provide you with any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me at ben.steffen@maryland.gov or 410-764-3566 or Ms. Tracey DeShields, Director of Policy Development and External Affairs, at tracey.deshields2@maryland.gov or 410-764-3588.

Sincerely,



Ben Steffen,
Executive Director

cc:

The Honorable Wes Moore, Governor
The Honorable Malcom Augustine, Senator, Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
The Honorable Heather Bagnall, Delegate, House Health and Government Operations Committee
Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
Senate Finance Committee
House Appropriations Committee
House Health and Government Operations Committee
Sarah Albert, Department of Legislative Services (5 hard copies)
Nathan McCurdy, Senior Policy Analyst and Counsel, Senate Finance Committee

¹ MIT Living Wage calculator at <https://livingwage.mit.edu/metros/12580>



Lisa Simpson, Senior Policy Analyst, House Health and Government Operations
Jonny Dorsey, Deputy Chief of Staff, Governor's Office
June Chung, Deputy Legislative Office, Governor's Legislative Office
Jason Heo, Governor's Office
Sophie Bergmann, Governor's Office
Laura Herrera Scott, MD, MPH, Secretary of Health, Maryland Department of Health
Nilesh Kalyanaraman, MD, FACP, Deputy Secretary, Public Health Services, Maryland Department of Health
Sarah Case-Herron, JD, Director, Office of Governmental Affairs, Maryland Department of Health
Kimberly Hiner, MPH, Director, Office of Population Health Improvement, Maryland Department of Health
Portia Wu, Secretary, Maryland Department of Labor
Erin Roth, Assistant Secretary, Maryland Department of Labor
Casey Tiefenwerth, MSW, Specials Grants Program Manager, Division of Workforce Development and Adult Learning, Maryland Department of Labor
Tracey DeShields, Director of Policy Development and External Affairs, MHCC

