



Montgomery County Mental Health Advisory Committee

February 7, 2023

Written Testimony in Support of SB0201

Senator Melony Griffith
Chair, Senate Finance Committee
3 East Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Senator Griffith

The Montgomery County Mental Health Advisory Committee (MHAC) and the Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Advisory Council (AODAAC) are pleased to support **Senate Bill 0201 with amendments [to clarify that behavioral health specifically includes substance use and misuse prevention]** which will call for amending the Maryland Medical Assistance Program to allow reimbursement of school-based behavioral health services when provided by eligible behavioral health care providers. MHAC advocates for comprehensive mental health systems, expanding school health and mental health personnel and services in schools, and strengthening program and resource coordination through improved school-community behavioral health partnerships.

The last few years have been intensely difficult for children, and we have seen the effects through increases in school-based incidents of violence and aggression, referrals to our crisis centers and inpatient treatment, suicide rates, and accidental overdoses. We have seen soaring rates of school disconnection, trauma, anxiety, depression, and suicide among our children and youth. The U.S. Surgeon General declared a [national crisis in youth mental health](#) and the nation's leading pediatric hospitals and professional medical organizations have been [Sounding the Alarm](#) to the mental health emergency being documented among children and adolescents. We have a compelling interest in expanding school health services and strengthening the coordinated support within our communities.

In 2014 the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) issued [guidance to State Medicaid Directors](#) officially permitting reimbursement for any Medicaid-covered services, removing a major barrier for schools to obtain federal Medicaid funding for student health services. The Safer Communities Act, recently enacted to prevent gun violence, also includes language requiring CMS to issue new school-based Medicaid guidance before June 2023. The statute instructs CMS to issue greater guidance and technical assistance to states and school districts on how to maximize new flexibilities to expand access to healthcare, particularly mental health services, to millions more children through their schools.

Maryland has not expanded its school Medicaid program beyond school health services documented in a student's IEP or IFSP. House Bill 82/Senate Bill 201 would begin the process of amending the Maryland Medicaid plan to reinforce eligibility and operationalize how school districts can better utilize Medicaid funding and make this critical investment in the physical and psychological wellbeing of our youngest residents. These efforts will further serve to better support the educators and school employees

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who also suffer the consequences of these challenges and need more resources to help their students thrive and succeed.

Our Committees (MHAC & AODAAC) assert that Maryland has the opportunity through **Senate Bill 0201** to pursue a **Medicaid State Plan Amendment (SPA) to draw down additional federal matching funds through Medicaid reimbursement, specifically for health and behavioral health services in schools.** We have an opportunity to expand the Maryland State Medicaid program to address numerous gaps in services, most specifically the need to cover services in schools. We need to expand the eligible services, the eligible students, and the eligible providers that can bill Medicaid for health and mental health services in schools.

There are concerns that the effort to increase services and practitioners in schools will poach the limited youth mental health professionals from the community, exacerbate staff shortages, and further strain their work. We cannot allow this to happen and must actively guard against it. We must strive to have school and community providers share resources, eliminate inequitable distribution of resources and funding, break down silos in communication, and coordinate our school and community services together.

Within the plans to implement the Blueprint for Maryland's Future is the need to maximize "external funding for behavioral health and wraparound." Maryland needs to maximize opportunities to access Medicaid funds to increase behavioral health professionals and services in all sectors across schools and communities. The MHAC supports the Blueprint implementation to expand school health and mental health personnel and services in schools. This will require us to also strengthen our program and resource coordination through improved school-community behavioral health partnerships. We are eager to support the state in pursuing the necessary policy changes to the Maryland Medicaid program and behavioral health services provided through Maryland Department of Health, Behavioral Health Administration and Maryland State Department of Education.

For all the reasons cited above, we urge you to support **Senate Bill 0201.**

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Susan Kerin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Susan" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Kerin".

Susan Kerin
Chair, Montgomery County Mental Health Advisory Committee

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Laura Mitchell". The signature is written in a cursive style, with the first name "Laura" being significantly larger and more decorative than the last name "Mitchell".

Chair, Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Advisory Council

For reference, “Behavioral Health Services” are defined in the Blueprint bill (HB 1300 (2020); Md. EDUCATION Code Ann. §7-4470) as: “trauma-informed prevention, intervention, and treatment services for the social-emotional, psychological, and behavioral health of students, including mental health and substance use disorders.”

“Behavioral Health Services” are defined in the Maryland Health General Code (Md. HEALTH-GENERAL Code Ann. § 7.5-101) as including: "prevention, screening, early intervention, treatment, recovery, support, wraparound, and rehabilitation services, for individuals with substance related disorders, addictive disorders, mental disorders, or a combination of these disorders.

Reference Documents: [Maryland Medical Assistance EPSDT, School Health-Related & Health-Related Early Intervention Services \(IEP/IFSP Services\): Policy & Procedure Manual & Billing Instructions](#)