



Sheppard Pratt

Written Testimony

Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
Senate Finance Committee
House Ways and Means Committee
House Appropriations Committee

SB 283 / HB 418 Mental Health – Workforce Development – Fund Established

February 7, 2023

Position: SUPPORT

Sheppard Pratt thanks the Maryland General Assembly for your longstanding leadership and support of mental and behavioral health providers in Maryland. This testimony outlines the Sheppard Pratt **support of SB 283 / HB 418 Mental Health – Workforce Development – Fund Established**. It is our hope that the Maryland General Assembly vote a favorable report on this legislation.

Maryland is in the midst of a behavioral health workforce crisis. But this issue is not restricted to Maryland – it is happening nationwide making recruitment beyond state lines also challenging. Federal data released just this month found that Maryland has 63 federally designated mental health professional shortage areas (HPSAs), including 11 entire counties. These shortage areas, in which less than 20 percent of residents are getting their mental health needs met, impact over 1.7 million Marylanders. Another indicator found that 17 of Maryland's 24 jurisdictions come in below the national average (350:1) in terms of population to mental health providers, with a number that are considerably lower.

This is unsustainable. There are simply not enough behavioral health professionals to meet the mental health and substance use needs of all Marylanders. At Sheppard Pratt, we are struggling to find applicants at every level of the organization.

There are many positive ideas and strategies for growing the behavioral health workforce – stipends and scholarships, enhanced training programs, loan repayment, paid internships, etc. This bill will help to solve the issue and begin to build the workforce we need in Maryland.

The bill establishes a Behavioral Health Workforce Investment Fund to reimburse for costs associated with educating, training, certifying, recruiting, placing, and retaining behavioral health professionals and paraprofessionals. Funding is left discretionary initially to allow for a required workforce needs assessment that will (1) determine the immediate, intermediate, and long-term unmet need and capacity of Maryland's behavioral health workforce; (2) calculate the total number of behavioral health professionals and paraprofessionals needed over the next 5 years, 10 years, and 20 years; and (3) make very specific findings and recommendations regarding the types of workforce assistance programs and funding necessary to meet the need across all sectors of the behavioral health workforce.



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At Sheppard Pratt, we know that Medicaid rates are insufficient to attract and retain Rehab and Recovery employees to staff residential programs for adults with serious mental illnesses. Without licensed residential programs vulnerable adults with serious mental illness are at risk for expensive hospitalization or homelessness. Medicaid Outpatient Mental Health Clinic rates are also insufficient. Current rates make it difficult to attract and retain licensed staff, cover administrative costs, keep pace with inflation and provide adequate access to care for outpatient mental health therapy and medication for adults, children and adolescents. We know that workforce is one piece of a complicated puzzle. This bill will put some of the pieces together.

Sheppard Pratt urges you to vote a favorable report on **SB 283 / HB 418 Mental Health - Workforce Development - Fund Established.**

About Sheppard Pratt

Sheppard Pratt is the nation's largest private, nonprofit provider of mental health, substance use, developmental disability, special education, and social services in the country. A nationwide resource, Sheppard Pratt provides services across a comprehensive continuum of care, spanning both hospital- and community-based resources. Since its founding in 1853, Sheppard Pratt has been innovating the field through research, best practice implementation, and a focus on improving the quality of mental health care on a global level. Sheppard Pratt has been consistently ranked as a top national psychiatric hospital by *U.S. News & World Report* for nearly 30 years.