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House Bill 983 State Personnel – Maryland Department of Health – Pay Rates

House Appropriations Committee

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Position: SUPPORT

Mental Health Association of Maryland (MHAMD) is a nonprofit education and advocacy organization that brings together consumers, families, clinicians, advocates and concerned citizens for unified action in all aspects of mental health and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as behavioral health). We appreciate the opportunity to provide this testimony in support of HB 983.

HB 983 would require that employees of the Regional Institutes for Children and Adolescents (RICAs), both in Rockville and in Baltimore, receive pay equal to the rate of similarly trained and qualified employees at Clifton T. Perkins Hospital.

Several years ago, a competency program was established at RICA Rockville, whereby justice-involved youth who have been found incompetent to stand trial are court-ordered to RICA Rockville for rehabilitative services. These youth have serious and complex mental health needs that often result in challenging and aggressive behavior. Accordingly, staff at RICA Rockville have received specialized training.

The patient population at RICA Baltimore has also seen a change in recent years that requires enhanced training and qualifications. Like their colleagues at RICA Rockville, staff at RICA Baltimore are receiving more youth with challenging and aggressive behaviors and youth with serious co-occurring developmental disorders and mental health disorders. In fact, RICA Baltimore was forced to suspend admissions for an extended period of time because their staff did not have the capacity to manage so many youth with such complex needs.

These are critically important institutions that have struggled to hire and retain staff. HB 983 would ensure the individuals working in these facilities are receiving pay that is commensurate with staff at Clifton T. Perkins Hospital, who are serving a similarly challenging population with severe and complex mental health disorders.

For these reasons, MHAMD supports HB 983 and urges a favorable report.

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