

**Senate Bill 592 Public Health - Health Care Quality Fund for  
Community-Based Behavioral Health Programs - Establishment**

Finance Committee

February 18, 2025

**Position: SUPPORT**

The Mental Health Association of Maryland 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 Senate Bill 592.

SB 592 establishes a fund that may be used only for training, grant awards, demonstration projects, or other purposes designed to improve the quality of behavioral health care in Maryland. The fund would consist of civil monetary penalties (CMP) collected from behavioral health programs that are assessed by the Behavioral Health Administration (BHA) or the Office of Health Care Quality (OHCQ). This would ensure that CMPs serve a greater function beyond just penalizing behavioral health providers; rather, these penalties would be reinvested into important workforce development and quality improvement initiatives.

Data from an [alarming new assessment](#) of Maryland's behavioral health workforce highlights an escalating crisis in access to mental health and substance use care. According to the report,<sup>1</sup> completed pursuant to legislation the General Assembly passed in 2023 ([SB 283/ HB 418](#)), the state's current behavioral health workforce is 50 percent smaller than necessary to meet today's demand, and 45 percent of the existing workforce is expected to leave the field by 2028.

The report recommends a range of strategies for addressing the workforce crisis, including greater support for paid education and training. The traditional model of training "on your own time" and "on your own dime" is limiting the behavioral health talent pool. Students are required to pay for their education or training out-of-pocket or through student loans, complete unpaid internships, pay ancillary costs for fees and books, navigate the certification and licensure pathway, then apply for paid employment. This model does not work for many adult-learners juggling second jobs and dependent care or low-income earners who cannot afford to do unpaid internships.

SB 592 would allow CMPs to be reinvested into important "earn and learn" opportunities, including apprenticeships, paid-internships, training stipends and more. It will bolster Maryland's behavioral health workforce, improve service quality, and increase access to care. For these reasons, MHAMD supports this bill and urges a favorable report.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Investing in Maryland's Behavioral Health Talent*. Maryland Health Care Commission. October 2024.  
[https://mhcc.maryland.gov/mhcc/pages/plr/plr/documents/2024/md\\_bh\\_workforce\\_rpt\\_SB283.pdf](https://mhcc.maryland.gov/mhcc/pages/plr/plr/documents/2024/md_bh_workforce_rpt_SB283.pdf)