



CITY OF TAKOMA PARK, MARYLAND

**SB 637
Support**

Senate Finance Committee

February 23, 2022

Senate Bill 637 Health and Health Insurance - Behavioral Health Services - Expansion (Behavioral Health System Modernization Act)

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The City of Takoma Park urges favorable consideration of this bill, which would enact a variety of reforms to provide necessary, high-quality substance use and mental health care to City and state residents.

The need for quality mental health and substance use care has never been higher. Nearly 40% of Marylanders reported symptoms of anxiety or depression in February 2021, yet only two-thirds could access counseling or therapy. From 2018 to 2021, there was an over 90% increase in suicide attempts and emergency room visits among Marylanders aged 65 and older, as COVID-19 made it more challenging for an already more-isolated population to see friends and family. Over 45% of youth in Maryland aged 12-17 who have depression did not receive any mental health care in the last year, and between April 2020 and April 2021 Maryland had the seventh-highest death total due to drug-overdose in the nation.

SB 637 can help. This bill includes a variety of reforms and enhancements designed to meet the increasing demand for high quality mental health and substance use care. It will increase comprehensive community-based treatment by expanding Maryland's network of Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics, improve health outcomes and treatment quality by increasing the use of measurement-based care in behavioral health and primary care settings, strengthen the behavioral health workforce by expanding resources for peers support networks and peer recovery specialists, improve care for children and youth by increasing the availability of home- and community-based wraparound services, and reduce reliance on law enforcement and emergency departments by ensuring stable reimbursement for crisis response services.

This is especially important for Takoma Park. Almost 20% of Takoma Park residents are 60 or older, and 27% are under 20. About a quarter of Takoma Park residents make less than 2 times the poverty line, contributing to mental-health strains. City residents have an urgent need for readily-available, high-quality mental health and substance-use care, which this bill will provide.

The demand for behavioral health care is at an all-time high. The enhancements in this bill are needed now more than ever. **The City of Takoma Park urges this committee to pass SB 637.**