



Senate Bill 506

Maryland Department of Health - Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Services - Needs Assessment Study

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Finance and Budget and Taxation Committees

Date: February 20, 2019

From: Natasha Mehu

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** SB 506 as it advances an important and necessary assessment on behavioral health capacity and needs across the state.

The opioid epidemic continues to plague the state. According to the Maryland Department of Health's (MDH) 2018 Third Quarter Fatal Overdose Data, the overall number of overdose deaths increased 8% and opioid-related deaths increased 10% since the same time period last year. In particular, deaths from fentanyl and cocaine mixed with opioids grew. The shifting nature of the epidemic highlights our need to understand it and to properly target best solutions.

SB 506 requires MDH to perform a comprehensive statewide study to determine the existing capacity and estimated unmet needs for mental health and substance use disorder services. The study requires that data be looked at regionally to give a more local insight.

The deadliness of the opioids that have permeated our communities makes it even more critical that treatment services – beds, facilities, providers – are available to meet residents' needs on-demand. Before we can meet those needs, we must first determine where resources are most needed and to what extent. There is high comorbidity between substance use disorders and mental illness, which means that discovering how best to treat residents with a wide spectrum of needs is crucial and complicated. SB 506 will help provide the answers needed to continue fighting the opioid epidemic.

While counties understand there are costs to performing such an extensive needs assessment, we strongly encourage that any of the designated funds not used for the study itself be allocated to meet treatment needs in already-recognized areas.

In order to effectively and efficiently deliver behavioral health services and assistance to our communities, it is imperative that MDH assess current behavioral health capacity and needs statewide. Accordingly, MACo urges a **FAVORABLE** report on SB 506.