



Senate Bill 522

Behavioral Health Programs - Licensing and Fees

MACo Position: **OPPOSE**

To: Finance Committee

Date: February 18, 2020

From: Natasha Mehu

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **OPPOSES** SB 522. The bill, as drafted, risks the unintended consequence of hurting the behavioral health programs it seeks to help.

SB 522 would establish a framework for licensing fees and renewals for behavioral health programs. The fees are at least \$1,000 for an initial license, \$750 for a renewal, and \$250 for a license change. Behavioral health programs that serve more people can be charged higher fees. Additionally, the bill creates a Behavioral Health Program Grant Program funded by the licensing fees to award grants to local health departments. These grants may be used to enhance local health department behavioral health programs or be distributed to nonprofit organizations who provide services within the county.

Local health departments and nonprofit community providers largely serve low-income populations. The licensing fees would be a substantial strain on their programs and may lead to cuts or reductions on the services they provide. There is already a shortage of providers in rural areas that an imposition of additional licensing fees may exacerbate.

Additionally, as some local health departments also operate behavioral health programs, counties are concerned that these local health departments would be forced into an untenable position as being the funding source of grants they are expected to receive to enhance their programs. Local health departments are also not structured to function as grant administrators and would incur additional costs to monitor and administer the grants. It would be an inefficient use of already limited resources.

While well intentioned, the bill is unworkable for local health departments and potentially detrimental to communities that lack behavioral health providers. For these reasons, MACo urges an **UNFAVORABLE** report on SB 522.