



Media Contact:
Chris Trumbauer
The Hatcher Group
410-990-0284
chris@thehatchergroup.com

[@keepdooropenmd](#)
www.keepthedoropenmd.org

Contact: Dan Martin, Behavioral Health Coalition, 410-978-8865, dmartin@mhamd.org

Media Statement on Maryland Senate Unanimously Passing "Keep the Door Open Act" (SB476)

Annapolis, Md. (March 17, 2016) – The [Maryland Behavioral Health Coalition](#) applauded the Maryland Senate for unanimously passing an amended version of the Keep the Door Open Act, [SB476](#). The Act increases budget funding for community behavioral health providers that provide treatment for people with mental health and substance use disorders. The Senate passed a similar version of the bill last year in a bipartisan vote, but the bill was not reconciled with the House version before the end of the General Assembly session.

Dan Martin, Director of Public Policy for the Mental Health Association of Maryland, speaking on behalf of the Maryland Behavioral Health Coalition issued the following statement:

“Once again the Maryland Senate has taken a strong step to increase access to critical mental health and substance use disorder treatment. With the growing threat of Maryland’s opioid epidemic and the uncertainty of the federal Medicaid budget, the need to increase access to community behavioral health treatment has never been more important for Marylanders.

If community clinics close their doors, then many of our most vulnerable Marylanders may lose access to medication, psychiatrists, therapists and other crucial resources. We’re thankful for the hard work of sponsor Senator Guy Guzzone and Senate Chairs Thomas “Mac” Middleton and Edward Kasemeyer for their strong leadership in their committees. We look forward to working with Speaker Busch and House of Delegates leaders to pass this important legislation for Marylanders who need behavioral health treatment.”

This year’s legislation, sponsored by Senator Guy Guzzone (District 13), increases behavioral health provider rates by 3.5 percent for fiscal years 2019 and 2020 and by 3 percent for the next three years after that. The bill also establishes a rate study to determine a cost-based payment structure that will provide adequate reimbursement to sustain community-based behavioral health services.

Members of the coalition say that demand for behavioral health services – which includes both mental health and substance use disorders – has risen dramatically but treatment capacity has not. A recent report by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services found that Maryland had the longest ER wait times in the country. The Maryland Hospital Association says the recent increase in wait times is being driven by mental health and substance use visits. Additionally, Medicaid spending for behavioral health related hospital admissions rose 45 percent between 2013 and 2015.

The House version of the bill ([HB580](#)), sponsored by Delegate Antonio Hayes (District 40), is under consideration by the Health and Government Operations Committee. Supporters staged a [large rally](#) last month on Lawyers Mall, where an estimated 500 people gathered in support of the legislation. Advocates are tweeting about the campaign using #KeeptheDoorOpenMd.

###

*The **Behavioral Health Coalition of Maryland** is a diverse mix of more than 40 non-governmental organizations working together to ensure individuals affected by mental health and substance use disorders have high quality and accessible services for their needs. www.keepthedoropenmd.org*