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HUNDREDS OF MARYLANDERS FLOCK TO ANNAPOLIS FOR “KEEP THE DOOR OPEN” RALLY FOR BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICE

Families, health providers and legislators ask for increased access to treatment to deal with mental health and opioid crisis

Annapolis, Md. (February 23) —More than 500 advocates and families rallied today in Annapolis to increase access to mental health and substance use disorder treatment. At the rally, led by the Maryland Behavioral Health Coalition, speakers called on the General Assembly to pass the Keep the Door Open Act and other legislation to increase access and funding for critical treatment services. The Act (SB476/HB580) is sponsored Senator Guy Guzzone and Delegate Antonio Hayes, and would ensure that adequate funding for community health providers is included annually in the state budget.

Advocates 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.

“We’re dealing with a serious crisis and we need to kick it up a notch,” said Senator Guzzone. “The Keep the Door Open Act will do just that – keep the doors to treatment open by supporting the medical professionals and direct care staff who are on the front lines of this crisis. This is a smart and critical investment to help the most vulnerable Marylanders.”

“We can’t ignore our friends, neighbors, coworkers and family who need help,” said Delegate Hayes. “Enough is enough - we need more access to treatment services in my community and in communities across Maryland. We need the Keep the Door Open Act.”

The Keep the Door Open Act indexes behavioral health provider rates, which have only had seven modest increases in the last 20 years, to the cost of medical inflation. Advocates say the bill is needed to attract and retain a qualified workforce by ensuring fair and stable provider rates. Community health providers administer traditional outpatient services, mobile treatment, crisis services, withdrawal management, rehabilitation, residential treatment, vocational services and housing.

Dozens of bills have been introduced during the current General Assembly session that pertain to Maryland’s ongoing opioid addiction crisis. Behavioral health advocates say that there is no easy solution but that an effective strategy must include education, outreach and treatment.

“We’re in the middle of a public health emergency in Maryland,” said Dr. Nancy Rosen-Cohen, executive director of National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence – Maryland Chapter. “To combat this terrible opioid addiction crisis, we need prevention and – most importantly – treatment. There’s no way around it.”

“Years of stagnant funding have resulted in Marylanders losing critical access to behavioral health care,” said Shannon Hall, executive director of the Community Behavioral Health Association. “We simply can’t maintain this downward trend. Our clinics are having trouble keeping their doors open when Marylanders need them now more than ever.”

Other speakers at the rally included individuals who use or depend on behavioral health services, along with family members and health care providers. Other legislators that addressed the crowd included Senators Adelaide Eckardt, Katherine Klausmeier, Richard Madaleno, Roger Manno, Thomas “Mac” Middleton and Craig Zucker.

Advocates also spoke in support of other legislation on the coalition’s [legislative agenda](#). These priorities include legislation that ensures more Marylanders can access crisis services by addressing coverage barriers for those with commercial health insurance (HB1288) and a bill that creates new long-term funding in the state budget for additional treatment resources to combat Maryland’s opioid epidemic (SB474 /HB 541). The coalition is also strongly supporting the Heroin and Opioid Prevention Effort (HOPE) and Treatment Act (SB967/HB1329), sponsored by Senator Katherine Klausmeier and Delegate Eric Bromwell.

The Senate version of the Keep the Door Open Act (SB476) is being heard this afternoon in the Senate Finance Committee, room 3 East in the Miller Senate Office Building. Hearings begin at 1:00pm.

Advocates are tweeting about the rally using #KeptthedooropenMd.

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THE BEHAVIORAL HEALTH COALITION is a diverse mix of 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. Find out more at www.keptthedooropenmd.org.

Member groups include:

Adventist HealthCare Behavioral Health & Wellness Services	Maryland Association for Partial Hospital and Intensive Outpatient Programs
Arundel Lodge	Maryland Association of Resources for Families and Youth
Baltimore City Substance Abuse Directorate	Maryland Behavioral Health Network
Baltimore Crisis Response	Maryland Clinical Social Work Coalition
Baltimore Jewish Council	Maryland Coalition of Families
Behavioral Health System Baltimore	Maryland Hospital Association
Catholic Charities of Baltimore, Child and Family Services Division	Maryland Nonprofits
Chesapeake Voyagers	Maryland Nurses Association
Children’s Guild	Maryland Occupational Therapy Association
Community Behavioral Health Association of Maryland	Maryland Public Health Association
Cornerstone Montgomery County	Maryland Psychiatric Society
Disability Rights Maryland	Maryland Psychological Association
EveryMind	Mental Health Association in Talbot County
Family and Children’s Services	Mental Health Association of Maryland
Family Services, Inc.	Mid Shore Behavioral Health
Good Samaritan Hospital Division of Psychiatry	NAMI Maryland
Harford-Belair Community Mental Health Center	NAMI Metro Baltimore
Health Care for the Homeless	National Association of Social Workers Maryland Chapter
Healthy Harford	National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (NCADD) Maryland
Jewish Community Services	On Our Own of Maryland
Key Point Health Services	Pro Bono Counseling Project
Licensed Clinical Professional Counselors of Maryland	Prologue
Maryland Association for the Treatment of Opioid Dependence	Sheppard Pratt Health System
Maryland Association of Core Service Agencies	Way Station