TO:       The Honorable Shane E. Pendergrass, Chair  
         Members, House Health and Government Operations Committee  
         The Honorable Karen Lewis Young

FROM:    J. Steven Wise  
         Pamela Metz Kasemeyer  
         Danna L. Kauffman  
         Richard A. Tabuteau

DATE:    February 18, 2020

RE:      OPPPOSE – House Bill 317 – Mental Health – Involuntary Admissions – Procedures

The Maryland State Medical Society (MedChi), the largest physician organization in Maryland, opposes House Bill 317.

This legislation would allow a psychologist or psychiatric nurse practitioner to be the sole health professional who examines a patient within 24 hours of an involuntary commitment. This runs counter to the current law which requires that a physician be involved at all stages of the involuntary commitment process.

MedChi believes that when a person’s liberty is at stake, the most highly trained and educated health care professional should be involved in determining whether the patient should be committed, and that is a physician. An inpatient psychiatric unit is an acute care unit analogous to a coronary care unit or intensive care unit. Currently, no policy allows a complex acutely ill patient’s care to be managed from beginning to end without the involvement of a physician. From MedChi’s perspective, people with serious brain diseases deserve the same standard of care as people with serious medical illnesses.

Psychologists and psychiatric nurse practitioners are valuable members of the health care team, but MedChi believes that decisions of this order require physician involvement.

For these reasons, MedChi opposes House Bill 317.

For more information call:  
J. Steven Wise  
Pamela Metz Kasemeyer  
Danna L. Kauffman  
Richard A. Tabuteau  
410-244-7000