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Senate Finance Committee

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Senate Bill 490 – *Maryland Medical Assistance Program – Step Therapy, Fail-First Protocols, and Prior Authorization – Prescription Drugs to Treat Serious Mental Illness*

POSITION: SUPPORT

On behalf of The Maryland State Medical Society (MedChi), the largest physician organization in Maryland, we submit this letter of **support** for Senate bill 490. This bill is narrowly drafted to prohibit the Medicaid program from applying a prior authorization requirement or step therapy protocol for a prescription drug used to treat an enrollee's diagnosis of: (1) bipolar disorder; (2) schizophrenia; (3) major depression; (4) post-traumatic stress disorder; or (5) a medication-induced movement disorder associated with the treatment of a serious mental illness. The bill has a three-year sunset.

In the commercial market, Maryland has made great strides to protect patients from unnecessary barriers that restrict or delay care for the treatment of a mental disorder. For example, a carrier may not issue a denial for a reauthorization of the same prescription drug or request additional documentation from the prescriber if the prescription drug is used to treat a mental disorder and certain criteria are met. In addition, Maryland has long allowed an individual not to be subject to a step protocol if the patient has already been on a drug for 180 days.

Medicaid recipients must not be subjected to protocols that delay or obstruct access to medically necessary care. When treatment is postponed or access to essential medications is restricted, the consequences are not merely administrative but are clinical and societal. Delays in care significantly increase the likelihood of psychiatric crises, emergency department visits, preventable hospitalizations, homelessness, and even involvement with the criminal justice system. These outcomes are not only devastating for individuals and families but also impose far greater costs on healthcare systems and communities.

Timely access to prescribed medication for individuals living with serious mental illness is a public health imperative. Policies that create unnecessary barriers undermine stability, recovery, and safety. We must prioritize systems that facilitate rapid, uninterrupted access to treatment, recognizing that early and consistent intervention prevents crises, reduces long-term expenditures, and upholds the dignity and well-being of some of our most vulnerable community members. Therefore, we urge a favorable vote on Senate Bill 490.

For more information call:

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