



The Hospital + Healthsystem  
Association of Pennsylvania

*Leading for Better Health*

March 21, 2023

The Honorable Stephen Kinsey  
Chairman  
Human Services Committee  
Pennsylvania House of Representatives  
P.O. Box 202201  
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2201

The Honorable Doyle Heffley  
Republican Chairman  
Human Services Committee  
Pennsylvania House of Representatives  
P.O. Box 202122  
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2122

Dear Chairman Kinsey and Chairman Heffley:

On behalf of approximately 235 member hospitals—including 157 hospital emergency departments and nearly 85 inpatient behavioral health units, institutions for mental disease, and standalone psychiatric hospitals—The Hospital and Healthsystem Association of Pennsylvania (HAP) writes to express its support for and urge Human Services Committee action on House Bill 22 and House Bill 24 which offer common-sense steps to address the commonwealth's behavioral health crisis.

Many aspects of our behavioral health system are in crisis. Pennsylvanians are not receiving the right mental health care, at the right time, or in the right setting. We believe that these bills represent important steps forward for the commonwealth's behavioral health care delivery system. As you may know, identical or substantially similar bills overwhelmingly passed the Committee last year. We believe that they represent well-vetted, bi-partisan, well-positioned policy measures.

Hospital emergency departments (ED) are a main point of entry for patients who need critical behavioral health care. While EDs are improving their abilities to effectively assess and triage patients in need of such care, after stabilizing a person's physical health, hospitals often face long delays in being able to move patients to the proper inpatient and outpatient settings to get the treatment they need. Placement delays require patients to wait in EDs for extended periods—a situation that is stressful for the person in crisis, the health care professionals who want to provide the best care, and the hospital staff charged with finding and coordinating clinically appropriate treatment. Hospitals are overwhelmed.

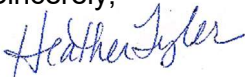
HB 22 offers much needed assistance to help hospitals timely transition patients to the care settings that are more appropriate to their needs. While this bill does not create new behavioral health treatment capacity, as proposed it would generate and gather data about the transition bottleneck—permitting the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, for the first time, to systematically track and measure the scope of this problem and, in turn, to craft targeted, effective solutions to this issue. Also, the bill enhances accountability for stakeholders who are key to ensuring that patients can access appropriate and timely care.

HB 24 seeks to make an investment to better integrate behavioral health treatment across the continuum of health care over the long-term. The goal is to support individuals' behavioral health before they reach crisis. One area of emphasis is the Collaborative Care Model (CoCM), which links mental health clinicians with physical health clinicians in other specialties, like primary care and oncology. With mental health expertise and services integrated into these practices, Pennsylvanians can benefit from well-coordinated, whole-person care. This legislation creates a grant program for small primary care providers to cover start-up activities, prioritizing rural and underserved areas of the commonwealth. Additionally, the bill would establish technical assistance to support promotion and implementation of integrated behavioral health care statewide.

There is no 'silver bullet' that can solve Pennsylvania's behavioral health care crisis. Shoring up the commonwealth's mental health delivery system in order to meet the needs of all Pennsylvanians will take sustained effort and a multidimensional approach. Along with the potential advancements offered by HB 22 and HB 24, HAP also continues to urge you and leaders of both chambers to immediately authorize the expenditure of last year's one-time, \$100 million appropriation of federal funds to support the recommendations of the Adult Commission on Behavioral Health.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and prioritization of legislative measures that aim to address Pennsylvania's mental health crisis. If you have any questions, comments, or concerns, please contact me at [HTyler@HAPonline.org](mailto:HTyler@HAPonline.org) or 717-433-1997. We stand ready to assist in this vital work that will benefit all Pennsylvanians.

Sincerely,



Heather Tyler  
Vice President, State Legislative Advocacy

CC: The Honorable Jim Struzzi