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**Senate Bill 550 - Sheila E. Hixson Behavioral Health Services Matching Grant Program for Service Members and Veterans - Establishment**

Finance Committee

February 23, 2021

**SUPPORT**

Senate Bill 550 establishes the Sheila E. Hixson Behavioral Health Services Matching Grant Program for Service Members and Veterans administered by the Maryland Department of Health (MDH). Beginning in fiscal 2022, the Governor may include an annual appropriation of \$2.5 million for the program in the operating budget.

MCCC member company, Easterseals DC, MD, and VA, is doing tremendous work in our community. Their clinic employees 16 people and serve the entire state of Maryland, plus DC and Northern Virginia. Tele-mental health is a key component of their delivery system and they deliver evidence-based practice at low or no cost to veterans, their families, and increasingly, active duty service members referred by their bases.

The Easterseals clinic was fully funded by hedge fund manager in Connecticut for its first 3 years and then it gradually decreases to 75%, 65%, and then long-term 50%. Unfortunately, insurance payments cover only a small fraction of the costs; as such, Senate Bill 550 will help fill that gap so these practices can continue to be offered at low or no cost.

The Chamber has worked with over 1500 veterans through the MCCC Foundation's Veteran Institute for Procurement, over 450 are in the State of Maryland. While the Foundation does not work in the mental health arena, mental health issues are a critical employment issue, and we applaud the work of the Easterseals.

For the aforementioned reasons, **the Chamber supports Senate Bill 550 and respectfully urges a favorable report.**

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Tricia Swanson, Vice President, Government Relations  
Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce  
301-738-0015 [www.mcccmd.com](http://www.mcccmd.com)