

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE-

**PRINCE GEORGE'S SCHOOL MENTAL HEALTH INITIATIVE AWARDED GRANT FROM MARYLAND COMMUNITY HEALTH RESOURCE COMMISSION TO EXPAND TELEHEALTH SERVICES TO STUDENTS IN PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY**

The Prince George's School Mental Health Initiative (PGSMHI) was recently named as one of 45 grantees to receive COVID-19 Emergency Relief Funding from the Maryland Community Health Resource Commission. This emergency funding will allow the PGSMHI to expand access to telemental health services to students in need.

The Prince George's School Mental Health Initiative (PGSMHI) started in Prince George's County, Maryland in 2006 through a collaboration between the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS), and the National Center for School Mental Health at the University of Maryland School of Medicine (<http://schoolmentalhealth.org>). PGSMHI staff provide mental health interventions, intensive case management, and family support for students in special education with significant emotional and behavioral health challenges. By providing these critical supports to students at school, the PGSMHI helps to remove the many barriers that often interfere with access and engagement in mental health care. With the closure of schools, these emergency relief funds will allow all students who are supported by the PGSMHI to continue to receive the mental health services and supports that they were previously receiving in school through telemental health.

The Director of the PGSMHI, Dr. Dana Cunningham stated, "We are so excited to receive this funding from the MCHRC. This award will allow us to decrease the digital divide and eliminate many of the barriers that have precluded some families from being able to access mental health care. As we navigate this national pandemic, we want to ensure that we are able to remain connected to the families that we serve and continue to provide them with the services that they need." Dr. Nancy Lever, Co-Director of the National Center for School Mental Health agreed with Dr. Cunningham, emphasizing "We are so grateful to the MCHRC for this funding opportunity. These funds will be used to address critical technology gaps for families and the PGSMHI, helping to achieve more equitable access to mental health care in Prince George's County. No student in need of mental health care should go without because



of limited access to technology.”

“The Community Health Resources Commission is thrilled to support the Prince George’s School Mental Health Initiative,” commented Mark Luckner, CHRC Executive Director. “This grant will help expand access to mental health services and support for students whose families and communities have been impacted by COVID.”

The grant from the MCHRC will allow the PGSMHI to purchase Chromebooks, WiFi hot spots, and headphones to allow students to access the telemental health services and to use the headphones to have more privacy during their therapy sessions. Each student who receives services through the PGSMHI will also receive a Mental Health Toolkit which will contain an age-appropriate box of engaging resources that can be utilized by the student during therapy sessions such as colored pencils, pens, crayons, cardstock, journals, and feelings charts. The funding will also allow the PGSMHI to purchase computers and headsets for staff to enhance their ability to telework and provide telemental health services more efficiently.

#### **ABOUT MARYLAND COMMUNITY HEALTH RESOURCE COMMISSION:**

The Maryland Community Health Resources Commission (CHRC) was created by the Maryland General Assembly in 2005 to expand access to health care services in underserved communities in Maryland. The CHRC is an independent commission operating within the Maryland Department of Health & Mental Hygiene (DHMH), whose 11 members are appointed by the Governor. Since its inception, the CHRC has awarded 266 grants totaling \$77.7 million, supporting programs in every jurisdiction of the state. These programs have collectively served more than 488,000 Marylanders, and grants awarded by the CHRC have enabled grantees to leverage \$28.4 million in additional federal and private/non-profit resources.