

An Act to increase investment in behavioral health care in the Commonwealth S.1287 | *Senator Friedman*



What problem
does this bill
address?

Behavioral health services have long been underfunded, resulting in significant barriers to receiving timely and appropriate care. Failure to provide behavioral health treatment when and where needed drives preventable illnesses, mortality, and costs.

What
difference will
this bill make?

This bill creates a timeline and process for increasing investment in behavioral expenditures, using the Health Policy Commission's existing cost growth benchmark and annual Cost Trends hearings to guide the process.

- The Center of Health Information and Analysis (CHIA) and the Health Policy Commission (HPC) will begin tracking behavioral health expenditures as part of its annual cost trends reporting and hearing process.
- During the first three years, behavioral health spending will be targeted to increase 30% per year above baseline expenditures, to be monitored by the HPC and CHIA for compliance
- A six-month task force, chaired by the HPC will develop a guiding principles and practice specifications that will assist health care entities in meeting their annual behavioral health expenditure target.

With a focus
on equity:

There are long-standing disparities in access to behavioral healthcare for Black and Brown communities; these communities are more likely to encounter barriers to receiving care, and, when it is received, this care is often lower quality. COVID-19 has exacerbated existing behavioral health issues for children and youth with an even more acute impact on children of color from historically disenfranchised communities. The task force created as part of this legislation will include a representative with expertise in the behavioral health treatment of Black Indigenous, and People of Color and a representative with expertise in the behavioral health treatment of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer community.

Why is this bill
needed now?

The chronic and longstanding underfunding of behavioral health services has resulted in people experiencing significant barriers to receiving timely and appropriate care. The behavioral health impacts of COVID-19 have yet to be fully understood, but the toll the pandemic is taking and will continue to take on children and families is severe.

This pandemic has highlighted the importance of behavioral health and wellness and the need for timely access to care. Measuring behavioral health expenditures and accordingly increasing investment in behavioral health care over the long term is crucial to building a system that meets the needs of individuals and families in the Commonwealth.