

**HOUSE . . . . . No. 1131**

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**The Commonwealth of Massachusetts**

PRESENTED BY:

*Christine P. Barber*

*To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in General Court assembled:*

The undersigned legislators and/or citizens respectfully petition for the adoption of the accompanying bill:

An Act relative to patient centered access to behavioral health services in accountable care organizations.

PETITION OF:

| NAME:                           | DISTRICT/ADDRESS:     |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------|
| <i>Christine P. Barber</i>      | <i>34th Middlesex</i> |
| <i>Carmine Lawrence Gentile</i> | <i>13th Middlesex</i> |

**HOUSE . . . . . No. 1131**

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By Ms. Barber of Somerville, a petition (accompanied by bill, House, No. 1131) of Christine P. Barber and Carmine Lawrence Gentile relative to patient centered access to behavioral health services in accountable care organizations. Health Care Financing.

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**The Commonwealth of Massachusetts**

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**In the One Hundred and Ninety-First General Court  
(2019-2020)**  
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An Act relative to patient centered access to behavioral health services in accountable care organizations.

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:*

1 SECTION 1: Chapter 6D of the General Laws is hereby amended by inserting after  
2 section 15 the following new section:

3 Section 15A. Patient Centered Access to Behavioral Health Services in Accountable Care  
4 Organizations

5 Section 1. Definitions. As used in this chapter, the following words shall, unless the  
6 context clearly requires otherwise, have the following meanings:--

7 “Behavioral health specialist” shall mean a licensed physician who specializes in the  
8 practice of psychiatry, a licensed psychologist, a licensed independent clinical social worker, a  
9 licensed mental health counselor, a licensed nurse mental health clinical specialist or a licensed  
10 marriage and family therapist within the lawful scope of practice for such therapist.

11           “Patient Engagement Advocate” shall mean a human services professional who provides  
12 patient navigation and care coordination services throughout the continuum of care. Advocates  
13 must have a minimum of an associates degree and/or demonstrated lived experience as a self-  
14 advocate or as a patient advocate for a family member dealing with mental health and/or  
15 substance use issues."

16           “Continuum of care” shall mean a system that guides and tracks patients over time  
17 through a comprehensive array of health services spanning all levels and intensity of care  
18 throughout the treatment process and into post-recovery follow-up to prevent relapse.

19           “Patient navigation and care coordination services” shall mean services offered by an  
20 ACO through Patient Engagement Advocates with the goal of removing barriers that prevent  
21 patients from seeking care, helping a patient follow through with a recommended course of  
22 treatment, and maintaining their gains after treatment:

23           Section 2. (a) All Accountable Care Organizations (ACOs) in the Commonwealth  
24 certified by the Health Policy Commission shall offer patient navigation and care coordination  
25 services as defined below for patients with a diagnosed mental illness or substance use disorder  
26 and for patients with symptoms that suggest a possible mental illness or substance use disorder  
27 as determined by a licensed health care provider. These services shall constitute a requirement  
28 for the certification of new ACOs by the Health Policy Commission and shall constitute a new  
29 requirement for existing ACOs six months following the effective date of this act. The services  
30 are to be offered by Patient Engagement Advocates with the consent of the patient. One Patient  
31 Engagement Advocate may be assigned to multiple patients, but each patient must be assigned to  
32 a primary Patient Engagement Advocate. In ACOs where multiple navigators are managing

33 different components of a patient’s care, the Patient Engagement Advocate will serve as the lead  
34 navigator that coordinates care among the other navigators. The services provided as part of the  
35 Patient Engagement Advocate Program shall include, but not be limited to the following:

36 i. Performing an initial intake to assess the patient’s needs. If the patient does not have a  
37 diagnosis, the Advocate shall refer the patient to a clinician who can determine their condition  
38 and recommend a plan of action/course of treatment. This may involve referral to additional  
39 specialists. Once a diagnosis has been obtained, the Advocate, with the patient’s consent, shall  
40 help the patient follow through with the plan of action set forth by the diagnosing clinician;

41 ii. Finding an appropriate provider to treat the condition(s) if outside the expertise of the  
42 clinician who provided the initial diagnosis, including contacting and screening providers on the  
43 patient’s behalf;

44 iii. Assisting with navigating health insurance; including but not limited to, helping the  
45 patient understand cost-sharing, finding in-network providers, assisting with referrals, assisting  
46 with appeals, explaining benefits and helping the patient find new insurance during open  
47 enrollment periods or due to a qualifying life event if their current insurance plan does not meet  
48 their needs.

49 iv. Finding alternative sources of support if a patient is put on a waiting list, including,  
50 but not limited to, coordinating with the patient’s primary care provider, exploring  
51 complementary therapies that could offer relief, online counseling and peer-to-peer support;

52 v. Scheduling initial appointments for patients and reminding them to go to their  
53 appointments.

54 vi. Providing or coordinating transportation to appointments if this is a potential barrier to  
55 care;

56 vii. Providing support with medication adherence to ensure patients take the medications  
57 prescribed by their clinician.

58 viii. Provider-matching follow-up to see if the current provider is a good match and if  
59 not, finding a different provider. Patient Engagement Advocates will continue to check up on  
60 patients as they receive treatment as an additional source of support;

61 ix. Coordinating care between the patient's PCP and different specialists treating the  
62 same patient to ensure they are communicating with each other;

63 x. Post-treatment follow-up to ensure that patients are maintaining their gains and do not  
64 relapse; and

65 xi. Additional duties may be designated by the commission in consultation with ACOs,  
66 health plans and patient advocates.

67 (b) All PCPs within an ACO shall refer patients with a diagnosed mental illness or  
68 substance use disorder, or with symptoms suggesting a possible mental illness or substance use  
69 disorder to the Patient Engagement Advocates. With the patient's consent, such Advocate shall  
70 work with the patient to identify an appropriate behavioral health specialist for the patient's  
71 needs and shall work with the patient to eliminate all barriers to accessing such specialist. The  
72 Patient Engagement Advocates shall follow up to ensure the patient gets an appointment.

73 (c) ACOs shall not restrict referrals to only behavioral health specialists who are part of  
74 the ACO.

75 (d) Non-behavioral health specialists within the same ACO whose patients also present  
76 with symptoms of mental illness or substance use disorder shall inform the patient's PCP of a  
77 possible behavioral health issue within 7 days of identifying non-emergency symptoms. With the  
78 patient's consent, the PCP shall then refer the patient to a Patient Engagement Advocate, as  
79 described in paragraph (a). For all emergency symptoms, the patient shall be referred to the  
80 nearest emergency room.

81 Section 3. The Secretary of Health and Human Services shall provide funding for at least  
82 one pilot program with a community-based organization that offers the services described above,  
83 and in addition, offers the following:

84 (a) Patient, caregiver and survivor services, including the Patient Engagement Advocates  
85 defined in Section 1; e-support networks; financial counseling; referrals to online Cognitive  
86 Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and for complementary, integrative therapies; and an evidence-based  
87 patient empowerment program, designed to give patients the tools to improve their self-concept,  
88 develop the confidence to seek treatment, and maintain their gains following treatment; and

89 (b) Patient empowerment, information and communication initiatives through a blog,  
90 public service announcements, patient stories, utilization of social media, videos and educational  
91 campaigns; and

92 (c) Provider education on the effects of stigma on patient engagement in treatment; on  
93 best practices for reducing stigma in clinical settings; strategies for integrating behavioral health  
94 into primary care; and strategies to maximize patient engagement in their own treatment.

95 Section 4. The Health Policy Commission shall promulgate regulations to implement the  
96 provisions of Sections 1 and 2 within 3 months of the effective date of this law.