

**Senate Bill 810 State Highway Administration –  
Electronic Signs Along Highways – Suicide Prevention**

Finance Committee

March 4, 2020

**Position: SUPPORT**

The Mental Health Association of Maryland is a nonprofit education and advocacy organization that brings together consumers, families, clinicians, advocates and concerned citizens for unified action in all aspects of mental health, mental illness and substance use. We appreciate this opportunity to present testimony in support of Senate Bill 810.

SB 810 authorizes the State Highway Administration to post information on suicide prevention, including a hotline number, on electronic signs along any highway within a five-mile radius of a high suicide risk zone.

In Maryland, the number of suicide deaths increased from 474 to 630 between 2000 and 2017, representing a 33% increase. Maryland veterans account for 18% of all suicide deaths in the state. Among African American children aged 5 to 11 years, the suicide rate has increased and is steadily rising,<sup>1</sup> and it is now the second-leading cause of death for black youth aged 10 to 19.<sup>2</sup> Suicide deaths are significantly underestimated and inadequately documented, which hampers efforts to identify and reduce or eliminate such deaths. SB 810 provides a new option for getting valuable preventive information to Marylanders at risk for suicide a time when they may need it the most.

It is essential that we ensure vulnerable Marylanders have access to information that could save their lives. For this reason, MHAMD supports SB 810 and urges a favorable report.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://blog.samhsa.gov/2019/07/23/alarmed-suicide-trends-in-african-american-children-an-urgent-issue>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/suicide-rate-rising-fast-black-youth-report-finds-n1103956>

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